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Title: A Study of Non-Persisters within a Cohort of Vocational Students at the University of Alaska Anchorage

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The purpose of this research was to explore non-persistence by vocational students in the College of Career and Vocational Education at the University of Alaska Anchorage. A cohort of 156 students were identified and tracked from fall 1989 through spring 1992.

In the first part of the study, using the University of Alaska Anchorage Institutional Research data base, demographic characteristics of the cohort, their patterns of enrollment and performance were identified. In the second part of the study, a sample of 12 non-persisters within the cohort were interviewed to learn about their motives for enrolling in postsecondary

vocational education, factors contributing to their withdrawal and their perceptions regarding the quality of their educational experiences.

Traditional-age (19 and under) students were the dominant age group, representing 46 percent of the cohort. Eighty percent of the students within the cohort were full-time students taking 12 or more credits. Over half (55 percent) of the students were "early-leavers" who discontinued their education at some point within the first year of the study. The graduation rate for the cohort was 3.8 percent and, at the conclusion of the study, 7.1 percent of the original cohort had maintained continuous enrollment, however, if students attending in stop-and-go patterns were included, 14.7 percent were still persisting.

Implications for further study revealed by the interviews of "early-leavers" (i.e., students who did not persist beyond the first or second semesters of the study) included the following questions:

1. What retention strategies, policies and procedures can be implemented to encourage persistence of vocational students beyond the first or second semester?
2. How can the University of Alaska Anchorage assist students with their career development and decision-making?
3. How can the University of Alaska Anchorage encourage the persistence of commuter students?

A Study of Non-Persisters within a Cohort of Vocational Students at the University of Alaska Anchorage

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

A STUDY OF NON-PERSISTERS WITHIN A COHORT OF VOCATIONAL STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA ANCHORAGE

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Every fall thousands of students enroll in postsecondary education but, at the end of the year, a large number of these students withdraw. Tinto (1982) indicated an attrition rate of approximately 45 percent of students attending four-year colleges and universities. This attrition rate has remained consistent over the past 100 years (1880-1980) with the exception of the time period after World War II when the G.I. Bill was in effect (Tinto, 1982). While attrition rates vary among individual institutions and types of postsecondary institutions, attrition from community colleges is higher than that of four-year institutions and has remained fairly constant at about 50-60 percent (Astin, 1975; Cope & Hannah, 1975; Grubb, 1989; Johnson, 1991). Research suggests that about half of all community college students dropout before the end of their first year (Grubb, 1989). Leaving college before completing a program or degree puts both individuals and institutions at an economic disadvantage. From the institution's perspective, with its budgets and appropriations based on student head counts or

generation of student credit hours, attrition represents a loss of economic resources. Not only does the institution lose money, time and energy spent on the non-persister, but it also loses a potential contributor to the institution--an alumnus (Cope and Hannah, 1975). The act of dropping out may also result in a loss of future economic advantage for the individual. Bean (1986) argues that taking just a few courses in a postsecondary institution contributes little to increase one's salary over that of high school graduate.

In his study of postsecondary vocational education, Grubb (1989) distinguished between five different types of institutions. The five were: 1) one- and two-year public technical institutions specializing in vocational subjects, 2) private vocational schools which tend to specialize in particular occupational areas, 3) four-year colleges, which may be either public or private institutions, which grant baccalaureate degrees and less often associate degrees and certificates, 4) private junior colleges most of which emphasize academic programs, 5) public two-year colleges which are also referred to as "community colleges" which grant associate degrees in both academic and vocational subjects. Two-year colleges (technical, junior and community colleges) represent the largest sector of American higher education with over 1,200 institutions serving more than five million students (Smart & Hamm, 1993).

Contributing to the high rate of postsecondary education attrition is the large number of students who withdraw from

community colleges. Compared with four-year public and private colleges and universities, two-year commuter community colleges retain the fewest number of students. However, despite high attrition rates, nine out of ten community colleges increased their enrollment from 1987 to 1992, and this growth is expected to continue over the next five years (El-Khawas, 1992).

Two characteristics have contributed to the popularity of the community college. These are the practices of accessibility and accommodation.

Accessibility

Typically, accessibility to American community colleges has been facilitated by minimal entrance requirements, comparatively low tuition rates and convenience of location (i.e., within easy commuting distance from populated areas). The basic requirement is graduation from high school or a general equivalency diploma (GED). This open-door admissions policy has been championed as fostering the American belief in "equality of opportunity" by increasing one's economic advantage through education (Vincent, 1981/82). Advocates of the open-door admissions policy argue that it provides access to students who otherwise would have no chance to continue their education (Vincent, 1981/82). However, others have pointed out that because community colleges enroll virtually anyone for any purpose, the open-door policy can turn into a revolving door,

inadvertently contributing to the attrition of the very students they seek to serve (Cohen, 1989; Roueche, 1968). Community colleges with non-restrictive admissions policies tend to attract students with lower levels of academic achievement compared with postsecondary institutions with selective admissions requirements. El-Khawas, Carter and Ottinger (1988) reported that community colleges enrolled 11 percent of the high school seniors accumulating a "D" grade-point average during their secondary education, while four-year colleges enrolled less than one percent of these individuals. Anderson (1981), Astin (1982), and Tinto (1975) each have pointed out that the type of college or university where a student begins his or her postsecondary education has a significant impact on persistence, independent of other institutional characteristics and student characteristics.

Another result of the open admissions policy in community colleges has been to attract a more heterogeneous student population than do four-year postsecondary institutions. Proportionately, the community college student population is more ethnically diverse and comes from lower socio-economic backgrounds than students in four-year postsecondary institutions. Enrolling over 47 percent of all minority students in higher education, minority student representation in community colleges includes 56 percent of all Native American postsecondary students, 55 percent of Hispanic students, 43 percent of African-American students, and 42 percent of

Asian students (Cohen & Brawer, 1991). Brint and Karabel (1989) attributed a large part of the growth in community college student enrollment since the 1970's to the successful recruitment of nontraditional students including persons of color, adult women, middle-age part-time attenders, and senior citizens.

Accommodation

Community colleges often schedule classes in off-campus locations and during evenings and weekends to accommodate their heterogeneous student population and their nontraditional patterns of attendance. Grubb (1991) identified typical community college nontraditional attendance patterns as late entry in the semester, part-time enrollment, working while attending community college and "stopping-out" for one or more semesters. Grubb (1991) argued that while these nontraditional attendance patterns have given community college students more latitude in tailoring their postsecondary education, they have also made dropping out more likely. Policies accommodating nontraditional attendance patterns can result in what Cohen (1989) described as a "lateral curriculum" in which prerequisites to courses either do not exist or are not enforced, and student progress toward program completion is not a major concern of the institution. The lateral curriculum promotes the image of the community college as a "resource available to all who wish to drop in anytime during their lifetime to take a course in whatever

interests them" (Cohen, 1989, p. 17). Some might contend that the lateral curriculum is contradictory to the traditional transfer mission of the community college.

Contrasted with this perspective is the traditional interpretation of "retention" which has been defined in the literature as completing a program within an allotted time (i.e., goal achievement), and "attrition" as not graduating in that length of time (Lenning, 1982). This concept of attrition is driven by the institution's perspective rather than that of its consumers or students. The institutional interpretation of retention may be inappropriate when the diversity in students' goals and students' nontraditional enrollment patterns are taken into consideration. For example, how does the institution measure persistence in the following instances? If a student's goal was to obtain a job and he or she was was employed halfway through his or her vocational program and withdrew, from the student's perspective the goal was met, yet from the institution's perspective, that student is part of the attrition rate. How does the local community college categorize the employee who seeks to upgrade job skills by taking one or more courses? How does the traditional interpretation of retention relate to reverse transfer students--those who have attained a baccalaureate degree or higher and enroll in a community college to gain skills for the purpose of employment? Is there room in postsecondary education for the adult learner who has enrolled in courses for avocational or personal enrichment or the high school graduate

who enters a community college to "try out" postsecondary education without necessarily having the maturity or commitment to complete it?

However, as appealling as a concept of consumer-driven education can be, Carter (1986) argues that unlimited access to community colleges without documented benefits is becoming difficult to defend both politically and economically. High attrition rates coupled with declining revenues has led to a renewed interest in postsecondary accountability on the part of taxpayers, state legislators, community college administrators and faculty. As Carter (1986) explained: "While the humanistic philosophies of open access and equal opportunity are indeed noble gestures, their cost must be justified" (p. 89). She recommended that institututional productivity and efficiency be measured through research on students and programs. One suggested method--longitudinal tracking of student cohorts (groups of students sharing characteristics)--has provided community college faculty and administrators with a better understanding of student demographics, enrollment patterns and achievement outcomes. Such a study could also reveal the intent and motivation of non-persisting students and target student subpopulations for retention efforts.

Purpose of the Study

In fall 1991, the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) engaged in a self-study for accreditation by the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges. This accrediting body required participating institutions to identify the outcome measures employed by the institution to assess effectiveness in meeting its institutional mission and objectives. The assessment of individual programs, and the University of Alaska Anchorage as a whole, had been based on program review, special and general accreditation requirements. According to Jacobs (1992): "These [requirements] are administered on an ad hoc basis over a cycle of five to ten years, are not linked to each other or to the assessment of students, and rarely have been used to improve productivity" (p. 8). A task force composed of UAA faculty members was appointed by the Provost and charged with preparing a proposal for systematic outcomes assessment; the proposal was completed during spring 1993.

The College of Career and Vocational Education (CCVE) had also started to investigate measures of student performance and effectiveness of vocational programs as a result of a federal mandate in Section 115 and 117 of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act of 1990 (Public Law 101-392). Additionally, a Total Quality Leadership movement was initiated by the Dean of the College of Career and Vocational Education in spring 1992, and, by spring 1994, the identification of assessment measures as they related to student

performance and individual program outcomes was to be initiated.

Although UAA students enrolled in university courses, continuing education, and community college programs were tracked in 1987 through spring 1990 by the University of Alaska Anchorage's Office of Institutional Research, there have been limited studies specifically targeting students enrolled in vocational programs. This lack of information is not uncommon. The American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (AACJC) recently studied tracking systems by sampling a number of community colleges (American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, 1992). Survey results revealed that student tracking systems are new to most community colleges, and most are still in the developmental stages. Of the AACJC member institutions polled in the fall of 1990, only 40 percent indicated that they had a computerized student tracking system in place, and over half of these institutions reported one year later that these systems had not been used to generate reports on the progress of student cohorts. Furthermore, the survey indicated that few colleges conducted employment follow-up surveys to provide indicators of what happened to students after they graduated or left the institution.

The purpose of this study was to explore non-persistence in enrollment by vocational students in the College of Career and

Vocational Education (CCVE) at the University of Alaska Anchorage. The first part of the study sought answers to two questions:

1. What were the demographic characteristics of students enrolled in the College of Career and Vocational Education and what patterns of enrollment were exhibited?
2. What were the performance outcomes of students enrolled in the College of Career and Vocational Education (i.e., retention, transfer and graduation rates)?

After establishing this baseline, the study then addressed these two questions:

1. Why did non-persisters attend the University of Alaska Anchorage and select vocational/technical programs in the College of Career and Vocational Education? Were their goals met or clarified?
2. How did non-persisters perceive their postsecondary experiences at the University of Alaska Anchorage, in general, and in the College of Career and Vocational Education specifically?

The first part, described in Chapter 2, used the University of Alaska Anchorage Institutional Research data base to select a cohort of 156 students who were identified based on shared characteristics. These characteristics were that students within the cohort were all associate of applied science (AAS) degree

seeking students who were admitted to the University of Alaska Anchorage and had no previous experience in postsecondary education. In this part of the study the demographic characteristics and enrollment patterns of the cohort were identified as well as their persistence and performance. In the second part of the study, described in Chapter 3, a group of 12 non-persisters within the cohort were interviewed to learn about 1) their motives for enrolling in postsecondary education, 2) factors contributing to their voluntary withdrawal, and 3) their perceptions regarding the quality of their educational experiences at the University of Alaska Anchorage.

CHAPTER 2: PARAMETERS OF THE PROBLEM

As fiscal resources have become increasingly scarce for postsecondary education, the demand for institutional effectiveness and efficiency has increased. At the national level, Congress has turned to the use of performance measures to insure greater accountability in such federally-funded programs as welfare and vocational education (Baj, Trott, & Stevens, 1991).

Two additional examples of the federal government establishing standards of national accountability include the recently passed "Ability to Benefit" legislation by which the federal government set levels of minimum performance on specified tests for those entering postsecondary education without a high school diploma and the "Student Right to Know" legislation which required disclosure to potential students of the persistence and graduation rates of postsecondary institutions (Ewell, 1991). According to Ewell (1991), the Student Right to Know and Campus Security Act of 1990 (P.L. 101-542) had the effect of initiating "standardized national methodologies for calculating and reporting common standards on collegiate outcomes" (p.16). As Congress set the example of greater accountability, many state legislatures followed. By 1987 two-thirds of the fifty states had enacted statewide assessment initiatives, nine states had called for intake assessment of

students' basic skills, and eight states were examining the issues (Finney & Boyer, 1987). Following national and state trends, in 1993 Alaska's legislature requested an assessment of instructional costs "including faculty workloads, administrative costs and organizational and tuition structures" (University of Alaska Public Affairs, 1993).

A number of technical, vocational and community colleges are assessing institutional outcomes based on quantifiable attributes due to increasing demands for proof of institutional effectiveness and efficiency (Makin & Shumaker, 1990). Some of these quantifiable measures of institutional effectiveness are reported in this chapter through the examination of the academic performance and persistence (i.e., graduation and retention rates) of a student cohort.

The Institutional Setting

The University of Alaska Anchorage shares characteristics common to community colleges due to its location, the students it serves, their motives for attending, and the original mission of this postsecondary institution. It is located in the largest city (population 226,338) in the State of Alaska. With campus housing serving fewer than two percent of the students enrolled each semester, nearly all students commute from within the eighty-mile radius of the Municipality of Anchorage or from the Matanuska-Susitna Valley which is forty miles to the north.

Classes are conducted on and off the main campus and scheduled during day and evening hours and on weekends. The University of Alaska Anchorage has an open enrollment policy requiring students to be at least 18 years of age and possess either a high school diploma or the equivalent (G.E.D.) or participate in the university's assessment and advisement process. This policy gives students who have not received a high school diploma or passed the G.E.D. a chance to continue their education as well as attracting those who wish to update or learn new skills.

A strong sense of the community college mission is woven into the tapestry of many of the degree programs within the University of Alaska Anchorage because it is a "merged" institution combining a former community college and university. The first of 12 community colleges in Alaska, Anchorage Community College was established in 1954. Over the next 24 years, 11 additional community colleges were established throughout the state. This growth of community colleges in Alaska reflected the rapid expansion of community colleges occuring in the United States during the same time period (National Institute of Education, 1984).

In 1977, the University of Alaska, Anchorage was established and shared a common campus site with Anchorage Community College. Ten years later, in 1987, responding to a significant decrease in state appropriations, the University of Alaska Board of Regents restructured the university system. Thirteen of the 14 separately accredited postsecondary

institutions were consolidated into three accredited multicampus universities. The community colleges became branch campuses of a university within each of the three regions with the exception of Prince William Sound Community College. The three regional universities, University of Alaska Anchorage, University of Alaska Fairbanks and University of Alaska Southeast, became the main campuses and administrative centers for the former community colleges within their regions (Tollefson & Fountain, 1992).

The community colleges in Anchorage, Soldotna, Kodiak, and Palmer merged with the University of Alaska Anchorage along with educational centers in Eagle River, Homer, Adak and several other remote extension sites. Of the three universities within the University of Alaska system, the University of Alaska Anchorage campus had the largest annual student enrollments during the time span of this study, fall 1989 to spring 1992. For example, during first semester of this study (fall 1989) 17,064 students were enrolled at the University of Alaska Anchorage main campus and extended sites compared with 8,472 enrolled in courses at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and 4,427 at the University of Alaska Southeast (Statewide Office of Institutional Research, 1990).

The concept of restructuring for the purposes of centralized administrative management as a cost-saving measure was not unique to Alaska. In eighteen states, more than 100 two-year colleges, campuses or institutes affiliated with state

universities for the purpose of state-level management. In addition to Alaska, all public community colleges in Nevada, Hawaii, and Kentucky are under the state university system (Cohen & Brawer, 1991).

Restructuring in Alaska was guided by several principles. One principle was: "Missions and functions of the community colleges and university centers would be preserved" (Tollefson & Fountain, 1992, p. 8). Programs and courses offered through the University of Alaska Anchorage which reflected this principle included lower-division college transfer courses; vocational, technical and career training; adult continuing education; continuing education classes; industry-related training; job-training partnership programs; adult basic education; remedial and high school equivalency courses. The College of Career and Vocational Education was created in the fall of 1988 and contained the majority of the vocational/technical programs which were previously offered by the Anchorage Community College. Included within the College of Career and Vocational Education were 26 vocational/technical programs which culminated in certificates and/or associate degrees and were offered on and off the main campus in fall 1989. A master of science program in Vocational Education transferred from the University of Alaska Southeast to UAA in 1988 and serves students throughout the State of Alaska. A bachelor of science in technology was implemented in 1990.

In fall 1989 the College of Career and Vocational Education served a total population of 1,210 part- and full-time students.

Cohort Selection

This study focused on a cohort, or group of students, that was identified by the UAA Office of Institutional Research on the basis of distinctive behavioral patterns that separated them from other part- and full-time students. The cohort was composed of all of those students entering UAA in the fall 1989 who met the following criteria:

1. This was the students' first experience in postsecondary education.
2. They had applied for admission to the University Alaska Anchorage and were degree-seeking. Casual students, taking an occasional course and those not formally admitted were not included.
3. Both persisting and non-persisting students were identified, with non-persisters receiving further study.

As a fourth criterion, the time-frame of this study (fall 1989 to the end of spring semester 1992) was selected to reflect the requirements of the Student Right to Know and Campus Security Act of 1990 (P.L. 101-542), which required public disclosure of graduation rates by all postsecondary institutions. Graduation rates were defined by this law as the proportion of

full-time entering students who completed a program within 150 percent of the normal time needed to earn a degree or certificate (Ewell & Jones, 1991). The starting point of this study, fall 1989, was one year after the creation of the College of Career and Vocational Education as part of the merged community college and university. Students were tracked by semester, exclusive of summer semesters, from fall 1989 through spring 1992. Summer semesters were not included due to the limited number of vocational/technical courses offered during those terms.

As a fifth criterion, only those students enrolled in programs offering an associate of applied science degree in a vocational/technical program on the Anchorage campus who could complete the degree requirements within 150 percent of the normal time needed (or six regular session semesters) were included. Since the University of Alaska Anchorage limited students to no more than 19 credit hours per semester without instructor approval, this confined the study to only those programs requiring 76 or fewer credits. Using this limitation, students enrolled in 16 of the 26 vocational/technical programs offered by the College of Career and Vocational Education were eligible to become part of the cohort under study. A list of the 16 programs is included in Appendix A. Each student meeting this criterion was included within the cohort which totaled 156 students.

Cohort Characteristics

While individual demographic variables are typically not useful for predicting attrition, they can be helpful in the identification of subpopulations within a cohort for further study (Lenning, 1982). To gain a better sense of the demographic characteristics of the cohort in this portion of the chapter, their similarities and differences are compared with the total student population at the University of Alaska Anchorage and those exhibited by community colleges in general.

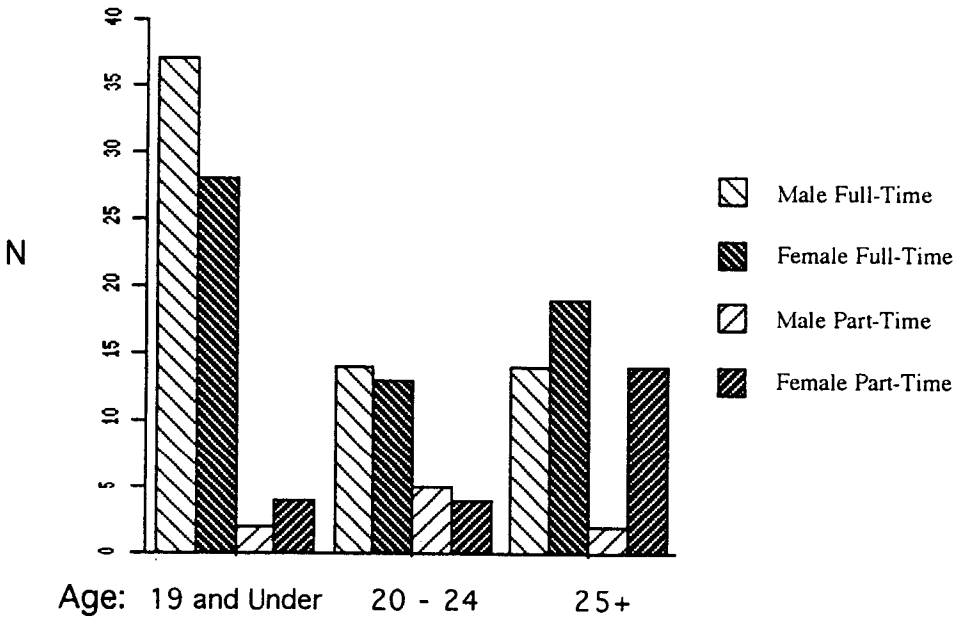

Figure 2.1: Numbers of Part- and Full-Time Cohort Students by Gender and Age

Age

Forty-nine students or 31 percent of all part- and full-time students within the cohort were adult learners (age 25 or older). Thirty-six students or 23 percent fell into the 20-24 age category, and seventy-one students or 46 percent of all full- and part-time students within the cohort were 19 years and under. While reflective of a state which has the second youngest population in the United States (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1991), this percentage was not typical of the age distribution of students in community colleges in the other 49 states. According to estimates by the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, 41 percent were 25 years of age and older, 29 percent were ages 20-24 and 30 percent of the students enrolled in community, technical, and junior colleges in fall 1985 were 19 years old or younger (cited in El-Khawas, Carter & Ottinger, 1988). This "greying" of the American community college student was also confirmed in a 1986 national survey of member institutions conducted by the Center for the Study of Community Colleges which showed that the mean age of community college students was 29, the median age was 25, and the mode was 19 years old (Cohen & Brawer, 1991). This survey demonstrated that even though community colleges were attracting large numbers of nontraditional age students, the dominant age group was still the 19 year old students. Traditional-age students in the cohort made up a much greater proportion of students (46 percent) than the group in the national study (30 percent) and the

same age group within the total UAA student population (10.5 percent) during fall 1989 (UAA Office of Institutional Research, 1989). However, even though the largest number of students within the cohort were traditional-age students, their numbers decreased during the time span of the study and by the conclusion of the study, the mean age of retained students was 27 years.

Evidence concerning the relationship between age and attrition from postsecondary institutions has been mixed. Several studies of two-year colleges reflected positive association between students' age and attrition, with older students significantly more likely to drop out (Aiken, 1968; Brunner, Packwood & Wilson, 1978; Gorter, 1978; Greer, 1980; Hunter & Sheldon, 1980; Johnson, 1980). However, research at similar institutions failed to note significant associations between the age of students and retention (DeVecchio, 1972; Pascarella & Chapman, 1983). In their longitudinal study of 5,892 students enrolled in 15 California community colleges, Hunter and Sheldon (1980) found that older students often enroll in one or two courses and are periodic students engaging in stopout or non-continuous enrollment patterns. On the other hand, Hunter and Sheldon (1980) suggested that younger students stay enrolled at a community college longer because their need for training is greater and "it takes longer for education to create a change in their lives" (p. 23). However, according to Lenning (1982), when compared with traditional-age students, older students tend to be

less current on their academic skills, less adaptable and slower in their work and thinking, but these weaknesses are compensated by their tendency to be more mature, motivated and traditional in their values. Lenning (1982) attributed the conflicting results of attrition studies to these opposing factors and the variety of reasons older students give for attending college.

In their analysis of retention/attrition studies involving 40 two-year postsecondary institutions, Bean and Metzner (1985) concluded that age, by itself, does not represent a major factor in attrition but can have an indirect effect on retention through interaction with other variables. For both the traditional-age student and the adult learner, some correlates of students' age can impact overall levels of adjustment to postsecondary education and be negatively related to persistence. For example, compared with adult learners, younger students may have fewer financial and family responsibilities but may be more dependent on family and friendship networks outside the institution for encouragement and less financially independent than older students (Johnson, 1991). Finding a social niche in college through which students share values and support each other through friendship and mutual concern for each other's well being was viewed by Tinto (1975) as central to keeping students enrolled in school. However, while there is good evidence validating this view with regard to traditional-age students enrolled in four-year residential universities, Bean and Metzner (1985) hypothesized that for older students, who have friends and

social support outside of the institution and who have already formed mature sets of values, social integration probably plays a reduced role in enhancing retention decisions.

In her study comparing persistence between traditional and non-traditional age students at Clayton Junior College, Greer (1980) found that, while the older students were more successful academically than their younger counterparts, their attrition rate was higher. She also found that non-traditional age students had a more positive image of the college and viewed it more as a place to take courses rather than for social life. Greer suggested: "Since these two age groups represent distinctly different subpopulations, each with unique characteristics and, possibly reactions to college experiences, it is likely that each group has special program and service needs" (Greer, 1980, p. 24). The identification of these two distinct subpopulations within the cohort, as illustrated in Figure 2.1, has implications for the College of Career and Vocational Education faculty and administration in terms of recruitment, advisement and retention strategies.

Gender

Although gender for part-time students was not tracked separately through each transition period in this study, 70 percent of all part-time cohort students enrolled during fall 1989 were female.

Table 2.1: Percentage of Part- and Full-Time CCVE Cohort Students Retained by Gender

Transition Period	Females %	Males %
Fall 1989-Spring 1990	53	47
Spring 1990-Fall 1990	52	48
Fall 1990-Spring 1991	57	43
Spring 1991-Fall 1991	58	42
Fall 1991-Spring 1992	50	50

As illustrated in Table 2.1, taking into consideration all age groups, there were predominately more part- and full-time cohort females (53 percent) than cohort males (47 percent) enrolled during the first semester of this study (fall 1989). This pattern remained consistent from semester-to-semester with the exception of the final transition period (fall 1991 to spring 1992) when the ratio of retained students was equally divided between females (8) and males (8). Gender did not appear to have an affect on rate of persistence. By the conclusion of spring semester 1992, 11 students who were continuously enrolled had been retained.

Although there is little evidence that gender affects persistence patterns, it may interact significantly with other variables (Pascarella, Smart & Ethington, 1986). Brunner, Packwood and Wilson (1978) found in their study of 600 randomly

selected students at Delta Community College in Michigan that gender was not a significant variable related to attrition but marital status was. Bean and Metzner (1985) speculated that gender is likely to have indirect effects on attrition due to family responsibilities (i.e., positive effects for women) and ability to transfer (i.e., negative effect for women). Lenning (1982) commented in his review of variables influencing retention that differences in motivation, socio-economic considerations and marital status could be attributed to gender. Lenning found that men were more prone to drop out and transfer than women and that men tended to give academic reasons for dropping out. Men also dropped out more frequently during their freshman year (Lenning, 1982). Lenning's observation was reflected in the data displayed in Table 2.1, which showed an increasingly larger percentage of cohort females than males retained throughout the time-frame of this study with the exception of the final transition period.

Ethnicity

Ethnic representation within the CCVE cohort during fall 1989 was distributed as follows: Caucasian (71.8 percent), African American (6.4 percent), Native American (3.9 percent), Alaska Native (12.2 percent), Asian and Pacific Islander (3.2 percent), Hispanic (1.3 percent) and Other (1.2 percent). Compared with the UAA student population on the main campus

that same semester, the cohort was more diverse. The UAA student population was distributed as follows: Caucasian (82.6 percent), African American (4.6 percent), Native American (1.2 percent), Alaska Native (3.8 percent), Asian and Pacific Islander (3.5 percent), Hipanic (2.4 percent) and Other (1.9 percent).

Minority representation within the cohort came closer to reflecting the ethnic profile of the state's population. According to the 1990 United States census, 75 percent of the population of the State of Alaska were Caucasian, 4.1 percent African American, 15.6 percent were Native American, Eskimo or Aleut, 3.6 percent Asian or Pacific Islanders, 3.2 percent Hispanic and 1.2 percent "other" (U.S. Department of Commerce, August, 1991). Sixteen percent of the cohort were Native American, Inupiak, Aleut, Alaska Native, Southeast Indian, Athabascan or Yupik compared to 5 percent for UAA's total population during the initial semester of this study. Within that population, females outnumbered males 58 percent to 42 percent. While 82 percent of students of color within the cohort were enrolled full-time, the majority of part-time students of color were female (75 percent).

In Fetter's (1977) summary of the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972, there was a significant difference in withdrawal rates of different ethnic groups enrolled in two-year colleges. Caucasian men had a lower withdrawal rate than African American and Hispanic men.

Fetters observed that among females ethnic differences were not statistically significant for either two- or four-year colleges. Lenning (1982) reported that Hispanic students tend to drop out more often and Asian and Jewish students less often. Lenning (1982) also commented that African American and Native American students drop out more often but such differences disappeared when variables involving socio-economic level, achievement test scores, and motivation were controlled.

Attrition studies regarding ethnicity at commuter two-year colleges indicated that when other variables, such as academic achievement as indicated by high school grade-point average, and socio-economic status were controlled, ethnicity was not a cause of drop-out (Brunner et al., 1978; California State Coordinating Council for Higher Education, 1974; Lenning, Beal, & Sauer, 1980; Martin, 1974; Rice, 1983; Wetzel, 1977; White, 1972). Bean and Metzner (1985) examined the ethnic differences in postsecondary attrition in terms of equality of educational opportunity and hypothesized that the primary indirect effects of ethnicity on attrition could be the result of low grade point averages due to comparatively poorer secondary educational experiences provided for minority students.

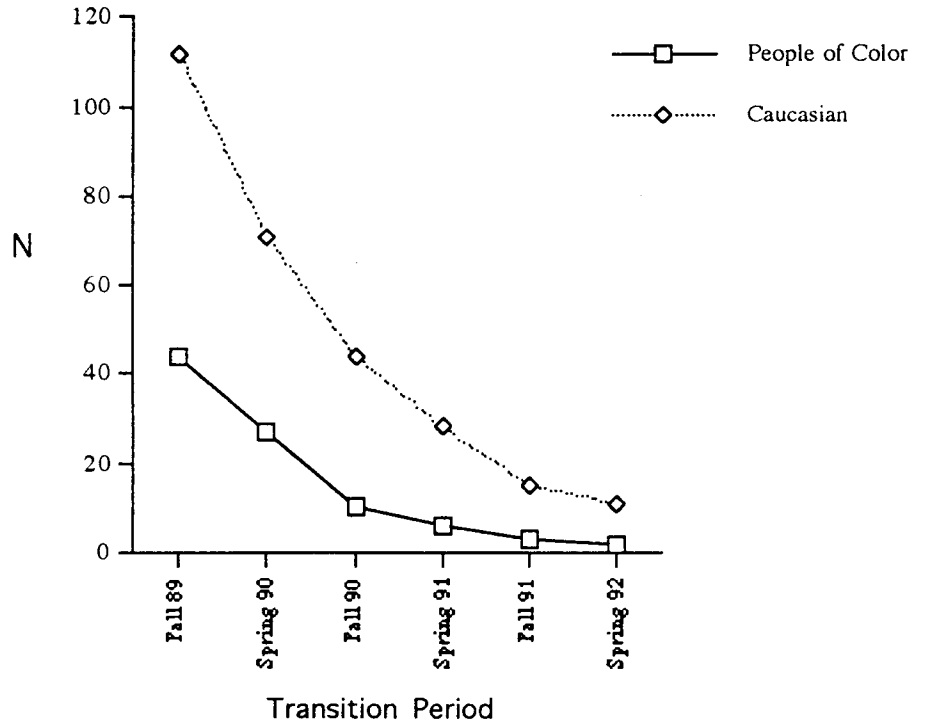

Figure 2.2: Retention of Part- and Full-Time Cohort Students by Ethnicity

Figure 2.2 demonstrates that the attrition pattern for cohort Caucasian students and those of color mirror each other with the largest number of non-persisters leaving sometime within or at the end of the first semester or the first year. Proportionately, the rate of attrition was more rapid for people of color than Caucasians. By the conclusion of this study (end of spring 1992) nine Caucasian, one Pacific Islander and one African American student were still continuously enrolled and one African American student had graduated with an associate of applied science degree.

Cohen and Brawer (1991) made the point that: "If the purpose of the collegiate enterprise is to pass most students through to the baccalaureate degree, then the community college is a failure by design" (p. 46). They argued that the community college attracts poorly prepared students with its non-restrictive admissions policies and encourages part-time and commuter students. They concluded that:

> For the minorities, as for any other identifiable student group, the question should be put more broadly: 'The community college or what?' For most students in two-year institutions, the choice is not between the community college and a senior residential institution, it is between the commmunity college and nothing (Cohen & Brawer, p. 47).

Enrollment Patterns

The characteristics and effects on retention of students within the who exhibited patterns of part- and full-time enrollment, continuous and "stop-and-go" attendance, and transfer to other majors within the University of Alaska Anchorage and other postsecondary institutions were studied.

A full-time student was defined by UAA as one who was enrolled in 12 or more credits per semester. Eighty percent of the students within the cohort were enrolled full-time during fall 1989. The cohort did not follow the typical enrollment patterns reported in 1987 by the American Association of Community and

Junior Colleges where about 33 percent of community college students nationally enrolled full-time (cited in Cohen & Brawer, 1991). The cohort also did not reflect the enrollment patterns of students on the University of Alaska Anchorage main campus in the fall 1989. At that time 36 percent (or 4,883 of 13,552) of the students were enrolled full-time. The Alaska State Student Loan requires full-time enrollment in a certified program. This opportunity for a low-interest loan could have contributed to the high percentage (80 percent) of the cohort's full-time enrollment. While the literature (Behrendt, 1974; Brunner et al., 1978; Cohen, 1969; Fetters, 1977; Lenning, et al., 1980; Knoell, 1976; Martin, 1974; Smith, 1980; Walleri, 1981) indicated that part-time students enrolled in two-year community colleges are more likely than full-time students to drop out, this was not the case with this cohort.

In addition to tracking part- and full-time enrollment of the cohort, the enrollment patterns in terms of continuous versus interrupted enrollment (i.e., stop-and-goes) were also studied. Students who were continuously enrolled attended subsequent fall and spring semesters, although they may have skipped summer semesters due to limited course offerings. Students who failed to continuously enroll in a following fall or spring semester but re-enrolled during any subsequent semester were categorized as stop-and-goes. For example, some Alaskan students enroll every fall semester but skip each spring to go commercial fishing to earn the funds to enroll the next fall.

As illustrated in Table 2.2, withdrawal by members of the cohort began to occur at the end of the first and second transition periods.

Table 2.2: Retention by Continuous or Stop-and-Go Patterns of Enrollment

	Continuous			Stop-and-Go		
Transition Period	Number	% of cohort	% decline	Number	% of cohort	% decline
Fall 1989	156	100	- -	156	100	--
Spring 1990	98	62.8	-37.2	98	62.8	-37.2
Fall 1990	54	34.6	-44.9	59	37.8	-39.8
Spring 1991	34	21.8	-37.0	44	28.2	-25.4
Fall 1991	16	10.3	-52.9	28	17.9	-36.4
Spring 1992	11	7.1	-31.3	23	14.7	-17.9

From fall 1989 to spring 1990, 98 of the 156 students re-enrolled in credit courses at UAA. This was a 62.8 percent retention rate for the first transition. After spring 1990, continuous enrollment began to diverge from returning students who had engaged in stop-and-go enrollment patterns. Fifty-four students or 34.6 percent of the original cohort of 156 were continuously enrolled from fall 1989 to spring 1990. However, 8.6 percent of the students who did not enroll spring 1990 returned to UAA in fall 1990 and exhibited a stop-and-go pattern of enrollment. They were counted as part of the 37.8 percent of the fall 1990 enrollment.

This irregular attendance pattern is typical of many community college students. Willet (1983) examined the attendance patterns of a cohort of 3,159 part- and full-time

freshmen at a midwestern public community college and found that, at the end of the five year period under study, only 13 percent had completed the requirements for a certificate or an associate degree, that 29 percent were "one-shot" students who attended for one semester only, 50 percent were "stop-out" students who had attended one semester, dropped out during the subsequent term, and then reenrolled at a later date, and eight percent were still enrolled. Pardee (1992) conducted a study at a medium-sized California community college to identify the characteristics of stop-outs. Study findings indicated that 30 percent of the students had been out of school for five years or longer and that the "desire to learn" was the most important influence to return. Because of the often lengthy time periods away from the institution, Tichenor (1987) labeled stop-outs the "invisible student body."

Grubb (1991) cautioned that the increasing flexibility of community colleges in allowing students more choices in how to complete their program can lead to "milling around." He described postsecondary students who "mill around" as those who fail to put together a coherent program and leave without accumulating enough credits to be of value for either transfer or employment. Grubb (1991) argued that when more flexibility was allowed by the system it also makes non-completion more likely.

Students transferring to other postsecondary institutions outside the State of Alaska were not reported by the UAA Student Information System. Neither did the system track transfers

within the University of Alaska system. For example, Anchorage campus students transferring credits to the University of Alaska Fairbanks or the University of Alaska Southeast were not tracked. This is not unusual as traditionally those institutions with a community college mission have been less interested in their transfer programs than in their vocational programs (Dougherty, 1987). According to Dougherty (1987) there are several reasons for this lack of emphasis on the transfer mission by community colleges. First, the vocational orientation has created lower transfer rates, and, second, community colleges do not control an upper division to which they can pass on students but rather depend upon four year institutions to accept them. However, due to the unique nature of the University of Alaska Anchorage as a "merged" institution combining a former community college and four-year university under one administration, opportunities are available for increased articulation between two-year and four-year programs within UAA. The BST (bachelor of science in technology) degree is an excellent example of a program which builds upon associate of applied science degrees conferred in a number of vocational/technical programs and provides the opportunity for students to continue their education and achieve their baccalaureate degrees without a loss in credits.

The system did track students who changed majors within the University of Alaska Anchorage. Eight out of 156 members of the cohort group or 5.1 percent switched majors within the UAA system. They switched from one of the sixteen CCVE programs

included within this study to the following UAA majors: Accounting (1); English (1); General Program (3); Justice (1); Premed Nursing (1); Social Work (1).

Cohort Performance

Various outcomes of the cohort were identified in this study. These outcomes included reporting the percentage of students within the cohort declaring a major, mean credits earned by retained students versus those not retained, grade point averages of retained versus not retained students, and rates of retention and graduation.

Declared Major and Retention

Regardless of the type of postsecondary institution attended, Bean (1986) indicated that one indicator of academic integration by students was "certainty of a major." He described the multiple advantages of declaring a major: ". . . students acquire an identity, can share values and fit in with a social group and have a career direction which links course work with later employment" (p. 54).

Rice (1983) found in his retention study of students on a two-year commuter campus that students with undecided majors were more likely to drop out the second and third semesters after initial enrollment than students with decided majors. However,

Lewallen (1993) used a national longitudinal data file which included a representative sample of students who entered college as freshmen in the fall of 1985 and were followed up four years later in 1989. The final sample for the study was composed of 18,461 students attending 433 colleges and universities varying in type (two and four year, public and private). The sample was limited to those students who sought a baccalaureate degree or higher. Only two percent of the students from two-year colleges were included within the sample. Lewallen (1993) found that four variables were significantly associated with persistence. They were 1) full-time enrollment, 2) attending a private institution, 3) attending a four-year college and 4) attending a university. Lewallen (1993) found that being initially undecided about career and/or major choice did not place students at-risk of not persisting with their college education. He offered that one explanation for this finding could be that the initial decision about major or career choice is very unstable due to the lack of knowledge of self, program requirements and occupational fields. Other studies have estimated that up to 75 percent of all students change their major at least once before graduation (Noel, 1985). Lewallen (1993) also found that undecided students do not comprise a homogeneous group and that making generalizations about them can be misleading. He pointed out that it is not unusual or surprising that a number of young adults enter higher education uncertain of their educational or career choices as each are at varying stages in their career development.

Some are at the decision stage when they enter college, but many are not.

Lewallen (1993) concluded that "being undecided is not the exception, but rather the norm" (p. 34). Danis suggested that:

> Rather than throwing students into an "undecided" category, would they, we, and our institutions be better served by the term 'exploratory'. . . all of these students are, in fact, exploring the possibilities open to them or the choices that remain to them (Danis, 1989, p. 4).

Of the 1,210 total number of part- and full-time students enrolled in the College of Career and Vocational Education programs in fall 1989, 630 (or 52 percent) had failed to commit to a major. This lack of commitment was reflected by the cohort with 51 percent of the cohort not declaring a major. A factor which may have unknowingly contributed to students not declaring a major was the option available to students of choosing an associate of applied science undeclared in 1989. This option was available until fall 1992. When the choice was removed in 1992, 307 students changed their status to another designation (UAA Enrollment Services, Third Week Status Report, Fall 1992).

Credits Earned and Retention

Pascarella and Chapman (1983) found that in both two- and four-year commuter institutions, commitment to the institution was defined by academic rather than social integration. This finding is underscored in Table 2.3 and Table 2.4 which demonstrated that retained cohort students academically outperformed those who were not retained.

Table 2.3: Mean Cummulative Credits Earned by Not Retained and Retained Students

Transition Period	Mean Credits Earned	
	Not Retained	Retained
Fall 1989-Spring 1990	4	19
Spring 1990-Fall 1990	16	34
Fall 1990-Spring 1991	31	49
Spring 1991-Fall 1991	54	59
Fall 1991-Spring 1992	60	68

Table 2.3 indicates that retained students earned more cumulative credits than those who were not retained. This is particularly true in the first transition when retained students accumulated, on the average, almost five times the number of credits earned by those who were not retained. Over twice as many cummulative credits were earned during the second

transition by those retained in comparison to those who were not retained. Although the gap was not as dramatic during the next three transition periods, retained students consistently earned more cummulative credits than those who were not retained. This may be attributed to the attrition of part-time students who took fewer credits and who tended to drop out more frequently than full-time students.

Table 2.4: GPA of Not Retained and Retained Students by Transition Period

Transition Period	Mean Current GPA	
	Not Retained	Retained
Fall 1989-Spring 1990	1.75	2.33
Spring 1990-Fall 1990	1.81	2.37
Fall 1990-Spring 1991	1.52	2.45
Spring 1991-Fall 1991	2.25	2.58
Fall 1991-Spring 1992	1.98	2.21

Grade Point Average

Table 2.4 demonstrates that retained students consistently outperformed non-persisting students with higher grade point averages during each transistion period. In addition to declared major and earned credit hours, grade-point averages (GPA) are indicators of students integrating successfully into academic

life. Costa (1984) reported that first semester GPA was a highly significant predictor of attrition for adult learners at a community college. Similar results for all age groups were found by Bell (1984) in a follow-up study of first semester community college students at Richland College, Texas. In Bell's study, 76 percent of the persisters and 62 percent of the dropouts were correctly classified using first semester grade-point averages and high school grades as predictors of attrition. For new part-time and full-time students attending 32 California community colleges, Knoell (1976) found that college grade-point averages were positively related to retention with continuing students earning higher mean grade-point averages than those who stopped. Several studies reported significant positive associations between cumulative GPA and persistence at commuter institutions (Peng & Fetters, 1978; Voorhees, 1985). Retained students within this cohort had higher GPAs for each of the transition periods compared with students who were not retained as illustrated in Table 2.4.

Graduation Rate

During the time span of this study six students or 3.8 percent of the cohort were designated as completers. These six students graduated with an associate of applied science degree from one of the 16 vocational/technical programs included in the study during one of three potential graduation periods:

spring 1991, fall 1991, spring 1992. These periods were included within the time-frame of this study which represented 150 percent of the time required to complete their program of study using the parameters of the Student Right To Know and Campus Security Act of 1990 (P.L. 101-542).

Low graduation rates would seem to indicate that the cohort had a high attrition rate. However, if effectiveness is interpreted in terms of student goal attainment, this single measure may be inappropriate for this cohort as it has been in other retention studies. For example, in a three-year longitudinal study of a sample of 6,500 students enrolled in occupational programs in 15 California community colleges, Sheldon (1982) found that only a limited number of students actually intended to complete a certificate or associate degree. Sheldon discovered some students enrolled intermittently to upgrade present job skills or to maintain professional licenses. The results of Sheldon's study exemplifies how the standard categorization of students does not match actual student intent. Students' perceptions of their reasons for attending the University of Alaska Anchorage and their attainment and/or clarification of those original intentions was investigated in the second part of this study and reported in Chapter 3.

Retention Rate

Excluding the six graduates and the eight students who transfered to other UAA programs, 11 continuously enrolled students or 7.1 percent of the original cohort of 156 students were still persisting in postsecondary vocational education programs by the conclusion of this study (end of spring 1992). Twelve students engaging in stop-and-go enrollment patterns were also still persisting and when they were added to the continuously enrolled students this increased the retention rate to 14.7 percent of the original cohort.

CHAPTER 3: NON-PERSISTERS

In the previous chapter descriptive information was reported regarding the demographic characteristics, enrollment patterns and performance of the cohort as a group. In this chapter, evaluative reactions were elicited from a sample of cohort non-persisters regarding their educational experiences at UAA in answer to the following research questions:

1. Why did non-persisters attend the University of Alaska Anchorage and select vocational/technical programs in the College of Career and Vocational Education? Were their goals met or clarified?
2. How did non-persisters perceive their postsecondary experiences at the University of Alaska Anchorage, in general, and the College of Career and Vocational Education specifically?

The beginning of this chapter discusses the methodology used in this part of the study. The sample is described, the interview process and questions are presented and treatment of the data and analysis are explained. In the latter part of the chapter, patterns which emerged from the responses of the non-persisters are described, and findings are reported to provide insights regarding non-persisters' intent and motivation for attending the University of Alaska Anchorage, those factors

which contributed to their discontinuing their studies, and their perceptions of the quality and value of their educational experience from their perspective as commuter students.

Methodology

The methodology chosen was open-ended interviews and was descriptive in nature for the purpose of exploring former students' motivation for attending the University of Alaska Anchorage and their perceptions of their educational experiences. In his discussion of theoretical models guiding attrition research, Tinto (1986) argues in favor of the use of such qualitative methodologies as the interview:

> [for]. . . in the final analysis, what matters is the individual's understanding of the situation--an interpretation of events that is necessarily a dynamic outcome of how the individual interacts with other persons and with the broader setting of which he or she is a part (p. 366).

Initial Sample

The sample for this portion of the study consisted of 86 early leavers, selected from 102 non-persisters within an original cohort of 156 students who were admitted to the

University of Alaska Anchorage in fall 1989, who also met all of the following criterion:

1. This was their first experience in postsecondary education.
2. They had applied for admission to the University of Alaska Anchorage and were degree-seeking.
3. They were admitted to a vocational/technical program on the main campus which could be completed within three years.
4. They discontinued their education after enrolling in the first semester (fall 1989) or the first year (spring 1990) and did not re-enroll by the conclusion of the time frame of this study (spring 1992).

To capture enrollment patterns typical of community colleges, persistence was operationalized as re-entry in subsequent semesters (Walleri, 1981; Winter and Fadale, 1986). Inherent within this definition is the recognition that there are different categories of non-persisters. Lenning, Beal and Sauer (1980) identifed those subpopulations as follows:

> Transfer Outs: Students who leave one higher education institution to enroll in another.
>
> Stop outs: Students who temporarily interupt their enrollment in higher education, with the intent of returning at a later time.
>
> Attainers: Students who leave higher education prior to graduation, but after

> achieving a personal goal such as a limited course of study, skill acquisition, or employment.
>
> Drop outs: Students who discontinue their enrollment in higher education in general, and do not return for additional study (p. 7).

Students who discontinued their enrollment after the first or the second semester and did not re-enroll within the time-frame of this study were initially designated as "early leavers." Early leavers may eventually be designated as falling into any of the four categories above.

If institutions do not distinguish among these categories they risk the possibility of overestimating the extent of the attrition problem and fail to identify subpopulations that could benefit from assistance by the institution (Ferguson, Wisner, & Discenza, 1986).

Of the original 156 students in the cohort, 102 were identified as non-persisters. These 102 students completed either the first semester of the study and failed to re-enroll in spring 1990 or completed the first and second semester of the study but failed to re-enroll fall 1990. However, 16 of the 102 non-persisting students re-enrolled at sometime within the time frame of the study after skipping one or more subsequent semesters. These students fell into the category of "stopouts." Eighty-six of the 102 non-persisters withdrew after completing

one or two semesters and had not re-enrolled by the conclusion of the study. These students were classified as "early leavers" and were the sub-population studied in this chapter.

Interview Process

To insure that the full cooperation of each respondent was obtained and maintained during the interview process, four concerns were addressed. These concerns were initiation of contact, location and time of the interview, interview procedure and interaction between the respondent and researcher (Stewart and Cash, 1982; Dobbert, 1982).

Using a table of random numbers, students were placed in random order, selected in that order and contacted in groups of 20. A letter from the Dean of the College of Career and Vocational Education was sent to each panel of subjects. The letter explained the purpose of the study, identified the researcher and requested the subject's voluntary participation (Appendix B). Using the telephone number supplied by University of Alaska Anchorage Office of Institutional Research, the researcher made an attempt to contact each student in the group one week after the letter was sent. If the telephone was not a working number, the operator was contacted and a current telephone number was requested. Contacting former students first by letter, then by telephone, spread the interview process over approximately five months.

The decision was made to contact the total population of non-persisters half-way through this part of the study as it became evident that it would be difficult to get sufficient numbers through sampling due to problems in locating the former students. Of the 102 non-persisters, 12 students agreed to and actually participated in interviews. The other 90 non-persisters were not interviewed because:

* Letters were returned as undeliverable and they did not have a listed telephone number (31).
* The listed telephone numbers were incorrect or non-working (47).
* A second party answered the phone and the researcher left a message with them but the non-persister did not return the call (9).
* The non-persister was contacted but refused to participate (1).
* The non-persister agreed to participate but did not appear at the agreed upon time and place for the interview (2).

Of the 12 interviews that were conducted, five were discarded. Three of the five had previous postsecondary experience, and two respondents had continued their education at UAA within the time frame of the study.

Concerns of comfort and convenience for the respondents were taken into consideration when identifying where and when the interview was conducted (Stewart & Cash, 1982, Dobbert,

1982). All interviews were conducted at a location and time convenient to the respondents. Four interviews were conducted on the main campus in the researcher's office. Two of the remaining three were held at the respondents' homes with the third held at the Sullivan Arena during Fish Expo. Fish Expo was a public conference which included seminars and display booths. The interview was held in a bleacher area with no other individuals sitting in the section except the respondent and researcher. Single interview sessions were scheduled for a duration of one hour. The length of the sessions ranged from 30 minutes to 70 minutes. There was no indication of shortened responses due to the respondent's discomfort or need to end the interview.

The purpose of the study and the interview process were explained at the beginning of each interview. Respondents were informed of their right to refuse to answer any question and terminate the interview at any time. No major behavioral changes were observed during any interview. With the exeption of one respondent who was somewhat distracted by a young child, respondents did not apparently exhibit any change of comfort level, stress or openness during the interview process. In each interview respondents showed complete comfort with all questions.

Permission was requested to tape-record each interview (Marshall & Rossman, 1989) and each of the respondents agreed. Prior to each interview, the contents of an Informed Consent

Form were first reviewed orally by the researcher. The respondents then read and signed the form (Appendix C).

The interview was semi-structured in terms of having the same set of questions asked during the interview in the same sequence. The interviewer recorded verbatim what each respondent said in answer to the questions. There were no restraints on the initial responses to interview questions. Respondents replied in a manner and with examples that were appropriate to them. When necessary, additional questions were asked to acquire more focus or detailed information (Dobbert, 1982; Stewart and Cash, 1988). Interviews were somewhat constrained by the predetermined questions. However, in some cases respondents would expand on one question and, in doing so, answer another question. In that case the answered question was omitted if the respondent's meaning seemed clear or further clarification was asked for if the question had not been clearly addressed (Stewart and Cash, 1988). Every respondent answered every question that was asked; there were no refusals. The interaction with each respondent was open, positive, and candid. They appeared comfortable and unhurried. Two respondents had gone to the effort of making 40- and 50-mile trips into Anchorage just to participate in the interview. These characteristics match those described by Dobbert (1982) of a good interviewee:

> It is generally agreed that good informants share the following characteristics: they appear

> comfortable and unstrained in interactions with the researcher; they are not hurried and are willing to spend time with the researcher; they are generally open and truthful although they may have certain areas about which they will not speak or where they will cover up; they stay on the topic or related important issues; they are thoughtful and willing to reflect on what to say (p. 263).

Questions

To determine student satisfaction and elicit a description of their behavior while attending UAA, responses were sought from a group of early leavers through open-ended interviews. Information was sought to discover each individual's personal educational goals and the fulfillment or clarification of their goals while attending classes at UAA. Student satisfaction with various aspects of the institution and the services it provides was also sought in addition to self-reported development in knowledge and skills. For these general purposes, the following five questions were asked of each interviewee:

1. Would you describe what was going on in your life in fall 1989 and tell me how attending the University of Alaska Anchorage fit into that picture?
2. What were your perceptions of the quality of your education while enrolled at UAA?
3. What were your general impressions of the effectiveness of the vocational/technical program in which you were enrolled at UAA?

4. What were the reasons for discontinuing your education at UAA?
5. How have you used the knowledge and skills you gained while enrolled at UAA?

Treatment of the Data

The researcher transcribed verbatim each of the taped interviews. Names of the respondents were removed and only code numbers were used to identify them in the transcriptions. A content analysis was done on the reponses to these open-ended questions. Categories were then developed from the collected data. Only after the coding was completed were the data compared to theory and organizational schemes in attrition/retention research and literature.

Findings

The seven individuals interviewed in this study fell into three age groups: 1) 19 and under, 2) 20-24, and 3) 25 and older. The three groups appeared to exhibit different patterns of non-persistence. Of the three traditional-age students, 19 and under, one had dropped out but re-enrolled at the University of Alaska Anchorage by the time the interview was conducted; one had left to get married and had not returned; and the third had

transfered from UAA to three other postsecondary institutions and, by the time of the interview, was enrolled again at UAA.

In the 20-24 age group, one of the two students interviewed had left due to poor health, and the other was unable to continue his vocational training due to inadequate reading and mathematics skills.

Both adult learners achieved their original goals. This finding was consistent with Greer (1980). In her comparison of traditional and non-traditional age (age 25+) students at Clayton Junior College, Georgia, older students seemed to be more certain of their goals. One adult learner who was enrolled in a program of adult developmental education courses at UAA attained a short-term goal of mastering "the little numbers--one to nine" and completing her semester's work but not her long-term goal of earning an associate degree. The other adult learner had achieved her goal of gaining the skills to become a medical transcriber although UAA does not offer this program. By the time of the interview, she was working part-time for a local doctor and had her own home-based business. She was able to accomplish this goal only by declaring a major in Medical Assisting and then, through advisement from the faculty member who served as the department head of that program, took the necessary coursework to prepare for her chosen occupation.

As she explained during the interview:

> And so I went to the State of Alaska and talked about a student loan. And they said to be able to qualify for a student loan I would have to be enrolled in (ah) I can't remember what they called it (pause)--a certified program and I had to be a full-time student and I had to be enrolled in a particular type of program. And so, the Medical Assistant program had all of the classes I wanted to take so I enrolled in that program although I really did not plan to complete.

As exemplified by the seven students interviewed in this portion of the study, students who may be labeled by the institution as a "drop out" leave for a variety of reasons. Upon closer inspection, a "drop out," may be a transfer student, a student who attends sporadically, one who leaves because he or she lacks the required basic academic skills needed to succeed, one who has met pre-determined personal or employment goals which do not translate into attaining a certificate or degree or one who leaves due to life changes. Tinto (1986) observed that if one examines non-persisters' reasons for leaving strictly from the institution's perspective it is implied that all leavings arise from the same source and cautioned researchers not to accept that assumption.

The seven early leavers interviewed in this study shared three characteristics. Each was an early leaver or left after completing either one or two semesters and did not return during

the time-frame of the study. Each was a full-time student, and all were commuter rather than residential students.

There is general agreement in the retention/attrition literature that most students withdraw at some time during the first year and before the beginning of the second (Cope and Hannah, 1975; Sexton, 1965; Summerskill, 1962; Tinto 1987). Within the original cohort of 156 students, 86 withdrew at some time within the first year and were classified as early leavers. The impact of this behavior can put a strain on such college services as advisement and registration. Large numbers of early leavers can have the effect of limiting second-year programming and can put a hardship on students seeking sophomore-level courses (Stahl & Pavel, 1992). Four of the respondents left after enrolling the fall 1989 semester at UAA. One enrolled during spring 1990 and withdrew after attending one week. Two completed both the fall 1989 semester and spring 1990 semester but failed to re-enroll within the time frame of this study.

For the purposes of this study, a full-time student, as defined by the University of Alaska Anchorage, was one enrolled in 12 or more undergraduate credits. Low interest student loans from the State of Alaska require full-time enrollment in a certified program and were an incentive for four of the seven respondents to enroll full-time. One respondent was not on student loan. Since the question regarding student loan status was not directly asked in the interview it is unknown if the two remaining subjects were on student loan.

The finding that each of the respondents was a full-time student was reflective of the original cohort. Within that group of 156 students, 80 percent were enrolled full-time during the first semester of this study. Typically, full-time students are less likely to drop out than part-time students enrolled in two-year community colleges (Behrendt, 1974; Brunner et al., 1978; Cohen, 1969; Fetters, 1977; Lenning, et al., 1980; Knoell, 1976; Martin, 1974; Smith, 1980; Walleri, 1981).

With less than two percent of the student population living in residences on campus, the majority of UAA students are commuters. Likewise, all of the respondents were commuter students with the adult learners (age 25 and over) traveling the greatest distance (80 miles and 100 miles round-trip daily).

Typical of commuting students (Hardwick & Hazlow, 1973) two factors, convenience of location and affordable tuition, were the most frequently given reasons for choosing the University of Alaska Anchorage as evidenced by the following responses:

> I had decided to go to UAA. . .primarily because of financial reasons. It was fairly inexpensive, I had been accepted, I wouldn't have to leave the state, I would still be with family. . . and would have numerous financial support if ever I was in any sort of problem.

> . . .the location. . . I mean, I didn't plan on leaving the State right away and it was ah, just right there. . . it was convenient.

> . . .I knew I could get into UAA because I had a pretty bad grade point average in high school. I didn't think I could get into any other schools which was probably wrong.
>
> Because it's close and (ah) I figured it would be a good school. I'm not sure why. I had known other people who had gone to UAA and said it [the welding program] was good.
>
> . . . it was local . . . I had heard a lot about it.
>
> I'm not sure why, it just was here.
>
> For the program.

When probed about other postsecondary educational options in the Anchorage area, including a private university and several proprietary colleges, each of the seven interviewees indicated that they did not consider any of these options a viable choice. Chickering and Kuper, (1971) commented that:

> Few commuters have, in any real sense, 'selected' their college. They attend a nearby college, and if its dominant attitudes and values differ substantially from their own, they do not have another choice. They cannot easily travel far to find more suitable institution (p. 260).

In his review of the literature, Flanagan (1976) indicated that the effects of commuting on students fall into four general categories: 1) time-management, 2) the conflict of a life divided between education, home, and work, 3) the student's perception of

and adjustment to the college environment, and 4) the fostering of the cognitive and affective growth of commuter students.

The distance and time it takes to travel are important factors in educational planning for the commuter student. Five of the seven respondents had short inner-city commutes to campus and did not indicate that their travel time impacted their education. However, this was not the case with the two adult learners who traveled the farthest distances. Both resided in the Matanuska-Susitna Valley, 40 miles to the north of Anchorage. One respondent had a daily commute of 80 miles round-trip, and the other traveled 100 miles round-trip.

The respondent with the longest commute was enrolled full-time in adult developmental education courses and described her persistence and typical day:

> Four months out of my life, every single day, I didn't miss a day while I was there. I drove in 50 miles one way. Every day I would come to class and I would be there at 8:00 every morning and that was the pretty severe time of the weather and there again my persistence and dedication to this because I had paid for these credits. . . I drove in every single morning with ice and snow and it was in the dark.

The second adult learner commuted 80 miles round-trip, juggling a part-time job (20 hours per week), family responsibilities and full-time enrollment for two semesters.

She carefully planned out her study time and turned her travel time into an advantage as she described to the interviewer:

> Ah, where did I study? I studied Sunday night reading into a tape recorder, and I listened to the tapes on my car stereo. That's how I studied. . . and Fridays were a study day for me. I only worked half a day on Fridays, and I didn't have any classes, and I hadn't told anybody that I didn't have any classes--I just said I was in school.

When the researcher reflected that it sounded like she was on a tight schedule, the respondent gave an example of how carefully she managed her time: "I had it scheduled when I trimmed my toenails. Sunday mornings, that's when I trimmed my toenails."

The logistics of travel can also have an effect on the amount of time the commuter student has for studying, work and family responsibilities. Five of the seven respondents reported that they worked part-time jobs during their attendance at the university. The total number of hours they worked ranged from 10 to 40 hours per week. Although none reported that they felt work interfered with their studies, work commitments tend to be more important to commuter students than to resident students (Schuchman, 1974). Typically, commuter students live a life divided between work, family and school especially if they are adult learners.

The two adult learners (age 25+) described their busy lives:

> . . .I was working part-time and I lived quite a distance from Anchorage so I was also commuting. Commuting,working half-time and a full-time student.

> I can remember that my family suffered a lot. . . Those four months, 120 days there it was--homework, homework, homework. . .and I was cutting out so much of my social life so I could get my homework.

The divided life also took its toll on one young man, who fell into the 20-25 age category, who was unable to manage his time between working approximately 20 hours a week, full-time student status and study. He ended up by dropping out the second week of his second semester. He described the difference between the schedules of the first and two semesters:

> Because the other courses during the semester were during the day, you know, it started about 9:00 which was fine until about 5:00 and I went to work about 6:00 you know. So everything worked right into line and then the other ones there was like a couple of classes a day and just a lot of studying. I never was really good at studying in high school. In fact, I never did graduate (from) high school and ah, anytime I was able to finish anything it was at the school just like the first [semester].

Regardless of age, commuter students lead a more segmented life than do residential students. The demands of

family, the workplace and peers not associated with the postsecondary institution can distract commuter students from their studies.

In any discussion regarding adjustment to the college environment, student intent for enrolling in postsecondary studies is a good starting point. Being a "merged" instituiion, combining a former community college and university, UAA emphasizes serving student needs, and its mission reflects the community college mission. This concept of serving student's needs, as they define them through their original intentions, choice of program and personal development needs, modifies the traditional meaning of completion. For example, when describing student persistence and completion at a community college, one must discard the assumptions that: 1) all students intend to earn a degree, 2) degrees will be earned within a two-year time frame and 3) students will attend college in "lock-step" fashion from one term to the next or drop out "for good" (Stevenson, Walleri, & Japely, 1989). To illustrate this point, among the seven respondents interviewed, none earned a degree within the three-year time frame of this study. Two of the seven respondents were committed to vocational courses or a program of study within the College of Career and Vocational Education. One had chosen the welding program as he anticipated the need for training to enable him to change occupations. The other respondent had put together her own sequence of vocational courses to gain the expertise needed for a new occupation. When

questioned about the perception of the quality of their vocational training, the other five respondents were unaware of their status as students admitted to the College of Career and Vocational Education. At the time of the study, students could seek an associate of applied science degree and have an "undeclared major" status which may have attributed to this lack of awareness. This option has since been eliminated.

When examining the concept of completion from the perspective of how well each respondent's unique needs or intentions were fulfilled in contrast with how well their individual program's articulated purpose was fulfilled, a different picture of the concept of completion and adjustment to the college environment begins to emerge.

> For students, completion may be completing a single course or remediating academic basic skill deficiencies or taking a conglomeration of courses that make sense to the student but does not conform to a formal program or curriculum pattern (Stevenson et al., 1989, p. 65).

The two adult learners, both female and over 25 years old, illustrated this point. The first individual was enrolled full-time in an adult developmental education program for the purpose of improving her basic academic skills to prepare her for an associate degree program. She was part of a cohort of 36 traditional and non-traditional age students which met and studied together four hours a day every day of the week. She was

encouraged by her family to enroll in UAA to improve these skills because she was poorly prepared by her elementary and secondary education.

As she put it:

> I could look back and I could see where every single class and every year, significant portions of my education fell through the cracks. Huge blocks and that's why I was struggling so hard to try to . . .get an education because all the way back to elementary I could see where I didn't have it.

Likewise, the other adult learner also had her own well-defined reasons for attending postsecondary education:

> I think that you could call it a mid-life crisis. I have worked in real estate in mortgage lending for about ten years and I had a good career in that with good potential but I decided that I wanted to change my lifestyle. [My] work was very stressful and I decided that I wanted to spend more time with my family and that I wanted to work at home . . .I had been looking fairly seriously for about a year or two but it was quite a big step to leave a good paying career and go back to school and start a new career (laughs) so I was a little nervous.

Her intention to go back to school as a result of a major life change is typical of adult learners (Knox, 1977) and the manner in which she tailored her program of studies using a conglomeration of courses to achieve her objective reflects the pragmatism of

many adult learners attending community colleges. As she phrased it, "I like to plan."

In preparation for her career switch, to becoming a medical transcriber, she first embarked upon a "fact-finding search" to find out about the occupation. This lead her to interviewing the department heads of both major hospitals in Anchorage and an office manager of a large internal medicine practice. She then met with the UAA Medical Assisting Department Chairperson and was told that while there was no formal program for medical transcription there were individual classes that would be helpful in preparing her for that career. However, while the respondent could finance her education partially by cashing in her profit-sharing plan at her previous job, she would not have enough money to quit working for eight or nine months and still be able to support her family. When applying for a State of Alaska student loan she discovered that she had to be a full-time student enrolled in a certificated program. Since the Medical Assistant program had all of the classes she wanted to take she enrolled in the program even though she: ". . . knew up front that I was not planning to get the certificate."

With good advisement from the department chairperson, which included testing to make sure she could be academically successful if she simultaneously enrolled in Medical Transcription I and Medical Terminology I, and her own careful planning, the student achieved her original intention. Her ability to plan and manage her own learning by locating and using a

variety of resources was an example of what Knowles (1980) described as the self-directedness of adult learners. She also went to the State of Alaska's employment service and completed vocational aptitude and interest tests and participated in lunch hour seminars coordinated by the UAA Counseling and Guidance Services on personality testing, job placement, preparing a resume and goal setting. As she explained while describing how she located and used resources to help her clarify her career goals: "Anything that was free that I could squeeze into my schedule, I took."

Recognizing that students, like these two adult learners, come to college with different motives, educators are beginning to define retention in broader terms than the attainment of a certificate or degree. "Some students become 'official' attrition statistics because they do not earn a degree or certificate, even though they successfully design and complete informal programs of their own" (Lenning, Sauer, & Beal, 1980, p. 8).

The two respondents in the 20 to 24 age category likewise had different motives for enrolling in postsecondary education. The first respondent had been in a bad accident the summer before he had enrolled.

> I (ah) was going through a lot of tough times trying to deal with people again. I almost lost my life, I had broken the bones in my leg and my arm, and skull. Lost my taste and smell and suffered some brain damage. Lost my hearing in my ear, and had blood transfusions. . .I enrolled in school here to try to get (pause) absorb something again, to try to help

> myself, cause there wasn't a lot of help out there for me at the time that I know about.

However, as Stevenson et al. (1989) pointed out, some students' definitions of success (intentions) may not be what a college wants to support. As he indicated: "I wasn't looking for a degree. I was just trying to re-establish myself as a person again." He indicated that his original motive for enrolling in postsecondary education was met and that if he was qualified to continue his education by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation he planned to re-enter UAA fall semester 1993.

The second student in this age group had a more traditional motive for enrolling at UAA. He was in the process of preparing for a possible job change. Anticipating that the gas pipeline (a major construction project which had been talked about for years in Alaska) might finally start up, he enrolled full-time in the Welding program. His stated intent was: "I wanted to get qualified in all the welding." His adjustment to the college environment was complicated by the fact that he was working 16 to 20 hours a week, supporting a family, and enrolled as a full-time student. He made it through the first semester taking mostly courses in welding. The first week into the second semester was a different situation:

> As soon as I got into the second semester and realized the reading and math was so hard, and it seemed that the class was so large there wasn't anyone to get me any help with it, plus working so much and plus, actually at that time I was working

> even more so I ended up (ah) turning it in within a week and dropping the courses.

His original intent of becoming certified in welding was not met, nor was he able to use his skills on his present job or in any other way. He failed to withdraw in time to get a refund on his tuition and at the time of his interview was still paying back his State of Alaska student loan.

There was an obvious difference between how traditional-age students responded to the college environment compared with the adult students. All three of the traditional-age students expressed feelings of insecurity and difficulties in adjusting to the size of the campus and routine of college life. One summed up his feelings as follows:

> You know, I was intimidated by the whole process. By the size, by the faculty, by everything. It was so much different and so that may have . . . discouraged me in a way from really kicking it in and just going right on through. Some students can do that. They can just go and then they graduate. Nonstop. . . But, ah, for some reason, I didn't feel comfortable. . .I didn't feel like trying.

In contrast, the adult learners exhibited a great deal more self-confidence and coping skills. One respondent who commuted over 80 miles daily to attend UAA classes summarized her perceptions of the experience as:

> It was really exciting. I think when I was in . . . high school I really enjoyed it but, uh, I had forgotten

> how much fun it was to learn something new. The challenge was very satisfying . . . I always sat in front of the class, (laughs) so for me it was like a small class. I felt kinda badly, I saw kids coming to school sitting in the back row with their Walkmans on and they were obviously just putting in their time and I thought that the adults (pause) they were paying for this. They had taken time out of their work or whatever, I thought that the adults were really very serious about it. It was a lot of fun to be in a group like that . . . that were so serious about doing something with their life.

The reasons for the traditional-age students having difficulty adjusting to the college environment can be better understood by exploring their original reasons for seeking postsecondary education. This group of three traditional-age students (19 and under) had graduated the previous spring from one of the six Anchorage high schools. Each expressed uncertainty with regard to career and educational goals as evidenced by their statements:

> I felt that I was enrolling in college primarily because everyone expected me to rather than I really wanted to.

> . . .just kinda trying to get a feel for what I wanted to do but ah, I really had no idea what I was going for or anything so I was just going to take some general courses until I hit on something.

> Basically, I didn't know what to do at the time . . . I was just going to get my general courses done because I was planning on transferring somewhere else in a couple of years.

Manski (1988) suggested that for some students, enrollment in postsecondary education is a decision to initiate an experiment, of which one possible outcome is to drop out. Manski and Wise (1983) noted:

> Like trial and error in the job market, postsecondary education may for many young people be part of the search process that leads to discovery of what they like and don't like and of which occupations are compatible with their interests and abilities. To this extent, students may derive informational value from attendance, even if they drop out (p. 10).

Grubb (1991) observed that community colleges attract many students who enter to try out postsecondary education without necessarily having much commitment to completion. He described these students as "experimenters." Each of the three traditional-age students would fit the definition of an "experimenter." Their self-reported programs of study (general courses) combined with their lack of persistence illustrated a phenomena Grubb (1991) described as "milling around." According to Grubb (1991) postsecondary students who fit this pattern fail to put together a coherent sequence of courses and withdraw without accummulating enough credits to be of "much value for either transfer or employment" (p. 213). However, the institution must not be too quick to write off the "experimenter." For example, in the case of the three traditional-age students in this study, by the time the interviews were conducted one respondent had re-enrolled at UAA; a married female respondent

had not re-enrolled but expressed a desire to go back to school; and the young man who indicated that he planned to transfer had transferred to three postsecondary institutions outside Alaska and was re-enrolled at UAA.

For a more comprehensive understanding of the exploratory pattern of behavior exhibited by these three traditional-age students, Super's (1957) career development theory was examined. Two major themes run through Super's work. The first is the concept that behavior is a reflection of an individual's attempt to implement his or her self-concept and the second is that life can be viewed in terms of developmental stages (Osipow, 1973). Super regarded the individual "self" as the "social organizer of one's experiences" (Super, 1984, p. 207). Not only does the "self" continuously develop and change, but the evironment in which the "self" operates is also in a process of transition (Super, Starishevsky, Matlin, & Jordaan, 1963).

One way an individual defines self-concept is through a series of developmental tasks pertinent to career choice which occur within a series of life stages. Drawing on the work of Buehler and Havighurst in developmental psychology, Super identified the life stages as growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance and decline (Osipow, 1973). Identified with each stage is an approximate age (e.g. growth/childhood, exploration/adolescence; etc.) although the transitions from one stage to another tend to overlap and are not absolutely defined by age limits as the transition from one stage to another is

dependent upon each individual's personality and abilities as well as the situation (Super, 1984). Transitions from one stage to another tend to occur several times during an individual's lifetime as the individual recycles from one occupation to another. For example, the life stage of exploration while typically initiated in adolescence can continue into the late twenties and thirties and can appear again as a result of a mid-career crisis or multiple trial careers.

With each life stage there are developmental tasks and attitudes and behaviors associated with that stage. For example, throughout the five life stages Super (1963) suggested that the following developmental tasks could be identified:

A. Crystalizing a vocational preference
B. Specifying a vocational preference
C. Implementing a vocational preference
D. Stabilizing in a vocation
E. Consolidating status and advancing in a vocation.

Super (1963) indicated that the first developmental task, crystalizing a vocational preference, was encountered typically during the exploratory phase of early and middle adolescent years and further refined the concept of crystalization by identifing behaviors and attitudes that could be observed and measured. Some of the behaviors and attitudes identified by Super (1963) included:

> . . . the awareness of the need to crystalize a vocational preference; use of resources; awareness

> of factors to consider and contingencies which may affect goals; differentiation of interests and values; awareness of present-future relationships; formulation of a generalized preference; consistency of preference; possession of information concerning the preferred occupation; planning for the occupation and wisdom of the vocational preference (p. 84).

Through understanding the behaviors and attitudes associated with the developmental tasks with which people were observed to cope, insights can be obtained into the "development of abilities, interests, and values and the interaction between the individual and the environment" (Super, 1984, p. 193). Vocational maturity can be measured by the developmental tasks with which the individual is trying to cope.

Super's concept of crystalizing a vocational preference during the exploratory life cycle can be exemplified by examining some of the attitudes and behaviors of one traditional-age respondent and one adult learner interviewed as part of this study. Although each was at a different chronological age, both were involved in the developmental stage of exploration. Both exhibited awareness of the need to crystallize an occupational preference. When first enrolled at UAA, the traditional-age student was in late adolescence (19), a time when society typically expects young people to begin to formulate a vocational preference and commit themselves to some type of training or education which would lead them toward an occupation. The catalytic experience, which motivated him to re-enroll at UAA

and seek additional education, was the realization that he had reached his limits in the workforce.

As he indicated:

> I entered into the workforce. . .and that's a real motivator in itself because you really become aware of your limitations quickly. You see yourself only going so far and then the education is the only way you can get to another level.

The adult learner was over 25 (judged by the researcher to be in her mid-thirties) and, as she phrased it, in "a mid-life crisis." She had a good career in real estate for about ten years and still had potential for growth, but she wanted to change her lifestyle to work that was less stressful and one which she could do out of her home.

While both respondents made use of resources to help them with the developmental task of crystallizing their vocational preference, the differences were obvious. The traditional-age respondent reported feeling anxious prior to his first counseling session at UAA and, while he sought direction from the counselor, he had not crystallized either his vocational preference or educational goals. He described his first appointment:

> I made my scheduled appointment and I had to wait like two weeks or three weeks so this anxiety builds up. You get in there and ah, I don't know, it just set the tone for me. I got in there and I was helped, and [the counselor] gave me some guidelines and stuff. I realized that [the counselor] probably has hundreds of other students [the counselor] has to help too and I

> don't deserve any red carpet or anything like that but (ah) it was like my first experience with the school. It wasn't so much like they'd never miss me if I was to drop out or anything but I didn't feel like I was taken under anybody's wing.

Super (1984) makes the point that if a student is vocationally immature in the sense of planfulness and lacks information about careers and occupations, interest inventories and other classical assessment methods have little meaning.

In comparison, the adult respondent planned for and sought out information about her vocational preference (medical transcriber):

> So I did some fact-finding search on that. I went and interviewed the department heads for Providence Hospital and Humana Hospital and I also spoke to the office manager for a large medical office here in Anchorage [internal medicine office]. And the thing that I had been most concerned about was that it would be something that would continue to interest me. I did not want to be bored on my job and just sitting typing didn't really sound real exciting but it filled some of my needs. When I found that there were so many specialities involved that any time you got bored with what you were doing you just switched over to another speciality and everyone was enthusiastic because they weren't bored all the time . . . all of those things (that) began to appeal to me.

The crystalization of a stable vocational preference is a cognitive process in which the "individual takes into account self and situational factors which affect the wisdom of a preference"

(Super, 1963, p. 85). This adult learner had to take into account such situational factors as the possibility of becoming bored while doing the occupational tasks and also determining how she could support her family at the same time she pursued her training. She worked at differentiating her interests and discovering her values through lunch hour seminars and job placement services. She participated in personality type testing, seminars on preparing resumes and goal setting and, as she stated: "I think that it helped me to really identify what my goals are."

In contrast, while the traditional-age student was aware of the need to differentiate his interests, he still did not exhibit planfulness behavior.

> The last year I have undergone some changes but I would like to get a bachelors locally here first and then maybe pursue some sort of a master's program or something somewhere else. But then again, here I attend the school and I am not even sure what master's programs are available here. That's something I should know. I should be totally familiar with all those things. I should have my plans laid out and I should have my courses laid out. Whereas when it comes the semester, most of the time I just take general education courses because I know that they will apply toward anything that I want to get--that's another part where I should be jumping in when I am not jumping in.

The adult learner completed her goal and is working in her chosen occupation. The traditional-age student has continued his

college education at UAA but, at the time of the interview, was still exploring. He was undecided about his major and gave no indication that he had crystallized a vocational preference.

While experimentation can contribute to attrition, retention can be facilitated through social and academic interaction with peers and faculty. The concept of academic and social integration was developed by Tinto (1975) building on the earlier work of Spady (1970). Tinto developed a model of persistence which was based largely on the "degree of fit" between the individual student and the postsecondary environment. Included within the model were variables reflecting a range of background traits (e.g. ethnicity, achievement in high school, academic aptitude, family educational background and financial capabilities). These background characteristics influenced a student's initial commitment to the goal of graduation from college and to the institution he or she was attending. The initial commitments along with background characteristics were hypothesized as influencing the academic performance of a student and how well he or she would become integrated into the institution academically and socially. Academic integration is typically associated with cognitive ability and such factors as classroom involvement and frequency of faculty-student contacts. Social integration refers to the amount and quality of student involvement with faculty members and fellow students for

non-academic purposes including extracurricular activities and campus based social affiliations (Pascarella, Smart & Ethington, 1986).

While research generally supported the predictive validity of Tinto's model and the importance of the concepts of social and academic integration, the model is limited. With the exception of site-specific studies and a few longitudinal studies (Pascarella & Chapman, 1983; Pascarella, Duby & Iverson, 1983; Pascarella, Smart & Ethington, 1986) nearly all of the research using this model has been conducted at four-year residential postsecondary institutions. Research based on the persistence of students attending four-year residential institutions is not easily generalizable to other postsecondary settings such as commuter institutions or community colleges due to differing student populations, the lack of residential facilities and diverse missions.

Pascarella and Chapman (1983) tested Tinto's model of college withdrawal on a sample of 2,326 freshmen from 11 postsecondary institutions representing three different types of institutions: four-year residential institutions, four-year commuter institutions, and two-year commuter institututions. While the results of this study generally supported the predictive validity of Tinto's (1975) model, when the data were disaggregated by institutional type, distinct differences were noted. Specifically, in four-year residential colleges, commitment to the institution had a stronger influence on

persistence than did goal commitment, social integration had stronger direct and indirect effects than did academic integration, and student background traits were affected through their college experiences. In four-year commuter colleges, institutional commitment had a stronger direct effect than did goal commitment. However the reverse was true at two-year commuter colleges. In both two- and four-year commuter institutions, academic integration had stronger indirect effects on persistence than did social integration. In both types of commuter institutions, student background traits were not totally mediated by the college experience, and had direct effects on persistence (Pascarella & Chapman, 1983).

To further test Tinto's model Pascarella, Duby and Iverson (1983) conducted an additional study to determine if it was generalizable to a non-residential institution. This longitudinal study used a sample of 579 students in the total incoming freshman class of a large urban, doctoral granting, commuter university in the midwest. The researchers found a direct positive influence of academic integration and persistence. In this study Pascarella et al. (1983) also found that intention to leave or stay as declared at the end of the freshman year had the strongest direct effect on persistence/withdrawal behavior and that institutional commitment had the strongest direct effect on intention. The researchers speculated that the environment of commuter institutions provides fewer opportunities for interaction between faculty and peers due to limited residential

facilities and the time students spent in commuting. They concluded that the actual experience of attending a commuter college may not be a powerful enough influence to retain students.

The lack of residential facilities and "gathering places" for students and faculty to interact informally with each can have an effect on the retention of traditional-age students attending UAA. For the traditional-age students interviewed in this study, there was evidence of little social integration. When comparing UAA with a residential state university he had transferred to, one traditional-age respondent revealed some of the social integration problems confronting UAA students:

> Oh yeah, there is so much difference. UAA is . . . I mean it's a university, but I don't find it like real university. . .I know the only social event as far as like meeting people and stuff I've gone to here is the UAA dances and I haven't gone to them for a year and a half. And even then, half the people are high school. So really, there is not much like mixing and mingling. When I was at [another university] I was in one of the dorms. I lived at Southedges which was an eleven story building and there were a bunch of other dorms so I got to meet like tons of people all over the place. I ended up with a lot of friends there. The only place I've met people here is in my classes. We didn't hang out. It just seems like this just isn't . . . it's a university but it isn't as complete a university as the other ones.
>
> I just think it is so hard to (socialize) here. Because nobody lives in the dorms. Nobody lives on campus here. Everybody lives out and about so basically, the

> only time people get together is for dances, hockey and basketball games.

Social interaction also involves mixing informally with faculty as this same student continued to explain:

> At [another university] you'd see, I'd see some instructors there at some of the little bars there. . . You'd see some of your instructors and you'd get to talk to them. Here, I mean, I'm sure you could see them here and stuff but I don't really recognize a lot of the instructors around school here.

Another problem contributing to the retention of commuter students is the type of significant relationships that are formed. The traditional-age commuter student tends to continue his or her relationships with former high school friends and neighbors who may not be supportive of attending school and may distract the student with other activities (Flanagan, 1976). Another traditional-age respondent described how the influence of his friends contributed to his lack of motivation and dropping out after one semester at UAA.

> (They) were experiencing the same sort of things I was where they felt they had a lot of potential but had problems attending or we weren't motivated totally.

He later became motivated after dropping out and becoming part of a workforce in which he discovered he could "only go so far."

He described his reasons for coming back to UAA:

> . . .you can see where you are going to top out when you are only 21 or 18 years old and that's as far as you are going to go. Its really a kick in the pants. You need to say: 'Well am I going to do this forever?' I know a lot of people do that and they retire doing the same thing after 30 years. Well, I'd like something better for myself, you know? I feel like I'd just be wasted. I'd be wasted potential.

This same young man later re-entered UAA and became academically involved through classroom interaction with one of his professors. He described the difference between the interaction of this professor and students in his classroom to that of other teachers he had experienced in this manner:

> Ah, he set the stage from day one. The first thing, he didn't spend any time the first hour we were there. . .talking about expectations or anything like that. He wanted, he made it, he went out of his way, I feel to let (us) know he cared about his students and he didn't. . .he wasn't there to identify anyone as a super student or anything. He just wanted everyone to succeed and he extended out and helped you if you needed help . . . He talked to you less. There is sometimes in a classroom . . . your professors are like up on a stand and ah, he's somebody who's brilliant and, they almost sound like they are talking down to a student you know? Rather than engaging in a conversation with someone who matters, an acquaintance. There's a bond that starts there.

Astin (1984) indicated that frequent interaction with faculty was more strongly related to satisfaction with college than any other type of involvement. He commented that this type of faculty-student involvement:

> . . . encourages the instructor to focus less on content and teaching techniques and more on what students are actually doing--how motivated they are and how much time and energy they are devoting to the learning process (Austin, 1984, p. 305).

Both adult learners experienced cognitive and affective growth. As discussed previously, both had a clear understanding of what they wanted to gain from their postsecondary experience at UAA. When questioned if she used the skills she learned during her semester at UAA, the adult learner enrolled in developmental studies responded:

> Every single bit of it! Absolutely, every single bit. And I thought, gosh, if I learn that in one semester think if I went two years, three years, or you know, to advance my education. I would be so powerful. And that goes with that old saying: 'Knowledge is power.' I use everything and I got a grasp . . . I got a handle on my 'little numbers' . . . couldn't add or subtract or the combinations of 9 little numbers. . .1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 is infintesimal but it is to get them in the right place. To have a sum or the bottom figure, the total or whatever it is to come out correctly. Yes, I did; I did get that fast now.

She reported that she was employed and using her skills on the job. Her semester at UAA also contributed to her affective development:

> It gave me a lot of confidence . . . when you are ignorant of something you have no confidence. Because you don't know what it is, you have nothing to compare to, you are very tentative. You are slow to move toward a new direction because you don't know what it holds. But if you have an education--getting exposure, broadening your horizons--your confidence just picks up, your self-esteem, you just step right out there. 'Well, I don't know what its going to hold but I am going to try it.' You never say, 'I can't,' you say, 'I can!'

The other adult learner interviewed attained her goal of retraining to become a medical transcriber and put her new skills to work for her immediately:

> . . .the job that I have now, is everything that I had hoped for. I work part-time in a doctor's office, and I have a full-time service out of my home. I met that goal of working at home and close to home. I give a lot of credit to the good direction that Janet (UAA faculty) gave me and the really excellent classes that I took. Everyone of them was very valuable.

She described her educational experience at UAA as: "It was a lot of fun. I had a good time."

The two students in the 20 to 24 age category painted a different picture of cognitive and affective growth. The first lacked both study skills and a grasp of fundamental skills in

mathematics and reading. When required to take classes in both areas second semester, he ended up ". . . turning it in within a week." When questioned if his original goals for attending UAA were met he said: "No I don't think they were." While he had not used his welding skills on his current job or avocationally he indicated that he would like to return to UAA and eventually become self-employed.

> I actually wouldn't mind doing the welding again. I actually enjoyed doing the actual hands-on welding, but I do need to take some reading courses. I know that. Probably a little more simplified reading (laughs) and math courses.

As reported previously, the second respondent in this age category attended UAA for the purpose of social rehabilitation. Although he did not overtly seek help from faculty during his semester at UAA, he was able to make affective gains due to the efforts of a psychology professor who assisted him in controling his aggression through biofeedback and a business professor who recognized his physical limitations:

> She was really helpful to me. Sometimes I couldn't do all the test and she would say: 'Your attention is not there,' And I would say, 'I can give you a rundown on what was going on.' She could see that I was all pinned together in class. All casted up and on crutches and carrying bags. And she (would say) 'Come here and I'll let you take it again--try again,' and I would get it done.

This respondent also was limited cognitively by his lack of study skills and weak mathematic skills. At the time of the interview, the respondent was going through Division of Vocational Rehabilitation assessment and planned to re-enroll fall 1993 semester if he qualified.

> This fall I plan on, uhm, I need to get my math back up so I will probably take general math and at that same semester something that will (unintelligible) college algebra. I don't know if that will work or not. As a matter of fact, I talked with one counselor here a while back and he said maybe just go to a community college because my study habits are bad.

Each of the traditional-age students exhibited some affective growth by the time of the interview despite their irregular enrollment patterns. Each of the three had discontinued their education through non-attendance. The single female respondent had completed one semester and then "I slacked off because I was getting married and planning my wedding and everything." She missed three of her four finals the second semester when she left the state to attend a family funeral and, by August, had moved out of Alaska. This respondent reported that she would like to continue her education; however, her husband was enrolled at UAA, and financially they could not afford both of them attending.

The two male students self-reported poor grade point averages due to non-attendance. However, the one male who indicated that his original intention when enrolling at UAA was

to transfer did accomplish this goal. Within the time frame of this study he had transferred from UAA to a community college, a junior college, a state university and, when interviewed, was re-enrolled at UAA. While his previous educational goals resulted in his declaring a major in his father's field of study at the state university and finding out he was not interested in it, his occupational goals were becoming more clarified: "I've always wanted to teach, be a teacher, so I was thinking about going into that here. Working on my general stuff here and then transferring back to [a state university in another state]."

The second traditional-age male contrasted his previous attitude toward postsecondary education and the present:

> Ah, why I originally attended. I feel that my drive and so on was not there. I felt that I was enrolling in college more primarily because everyone expected me to rather than I really wanted to and so (clears throat) when I began school and stuff I, I don't know, it was like half-hearted effort. You know, I wasn't there to succeed which is something which has changed now . . . I felt that I was going for all the wrong reasons and that I needed to decide that I wanted to go for my own before I (was) really kicking in and being successful. I knew I could be.

When faced with the realization that he could see where he was going to "top-out" on the job and that was far as he could go,

he recognized that he needed to continue his education. As he phrased it:

> I mean, you kinda hit your head on the roof and you are with everybody else and I think that maybe college is something that puts your head a little bit higher up and makes you aware of a few more things that maybe--just subtle details, maybe nuances--just little things that you may have not been aware of that may have just passed you by.

In this chapter, further study of non-persistent enrollment behavior was explored through interviews with seven students from the cohort. Information gained as a result of these interviews raised questions regarding how the institution facilitates persistence of early-leavers, assists them in their career planning and decision-making, and encourages their commitment as commuter students to the university.

Persistence can be linked to original intent for attending an institution. Interviews with seven early-leavers indicated that they attended UAA for a variety of personal, career and educational reasons. Only one out of the seven sought an associate of applied science degree in a vocational/technical program. Reasons for withdrawal included completion of original goals, transfer to another postsecondary institution, personal reasons (health considerations and change in marital status), lack of proficiency in basic academic skills and feeling like they did not "fit "into the institution. Some, but not all, of

these reasons for non-persistence can be addressed by the university through policies, practices and procedures.

A second concern revealed in this portion of the study was how UAA assists students with their career development and decision-making. Traditional-age students (19 and under), who were all from local high schools, expressed difficulties with crystallizing their educational and career goals. Interviews with each of these young people indicated that at the time of the study, they could be classified as "experimenters" who had no clear idea of why they were attending the university other than exploring their options. Although they were admitted to the College of Career and Vocational Education, each was enrolled in general studies course work, and none had taken any vocational/technical courses. Each engaged in some planfulness behavior by seeking assistance from counseling and guidance services, but none of them were successful in crystallizing their vocational preferences. Traditional-age students also reported that non-attendance and poor study skills contributed to their early withdrawal. In contrast, the adult learners demonstrated a clear understanding of themselves and their goals. They sought out resources to help them make career and educational decisions and, through careful planning and persistence, met their original objectives. Adult learners stopped attending UAA because they had achieved their objectives.

A third concern revealed by these interview centered around the fact that respondents were all commuter students, and their

reasons for selecting UAA as a postsecondary institution were those typically given by students who attend urban commuter postsecondary institutions--convenience of location and affordable tuition. In the absence of opportunities for social integration (e.g., few residential halls and other gathering places, social events, fraternal organizations etc.), it is questionable if these two reasons are strong enough motivators to encourage institutional commitment and persistence. However, while lacking opportunities for social integration, which is typical of commuter postsecondary institutions, there was evidence of academic integration which was fostered through faculty involvement with both traditional-age students and adult learners. Traditional-age students felt the strongest need for social integration into the institution while this was less of a concern for adult learners. Additionally, the effects of commuting--attention to time-management and living a life divided between various responsibilites--were difficult for students of all ages. In this study, time appeared to be the most pressing issue for the adult learners who had the longest commutes and the most family responsibilities.

In the next chapter the results this two-part study on non-persistence are summarized. The limitations of the study are described and implications for further study by the administration and faculty of the College of Career and Vocational Education, specifically, and UAA, in general, are outlined.

CHAPTER 4: SUMMARY, LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore non-persistence in enrollment by vocational students in the College of Career and Vocational Education at the University of Alaska Anchorage. In the first part of this two-part study on non-persistence, 156 students were identified by the UAA Office of Institutional Research as belonging to a cohort of students who had not previously attended a postsecondary institution, were admitted into the University of Alaska Anchorage, and sought an associate of applied science degree from one of sixteen vocational/technical programs offered on the main campus. The cohort's demographic characteristics, patterns of enrollment, and performance were studied. The time frame for the first part of this study was fall semester 1989 and extended through spring semester 1992. Using the Student Right to Know and Campus Security Act of 1990 (P.L. 101-542) as a guide, this represented 150 percent of the time which would have been needed to complete an associate degree in each of these programs. In the second part of the study, seven non-persisters were interviewed to gain an understanding of their motives for enrolling in postsecondary education, factors contributing to their

withdrawal and their perceptions regarding the quality of their first postsecondary educational experience in vocational/technical programs at the University of Alaska Anchorage. Each of the seven students were classified as early leavers (i.e., had withdrawn at some point within the first two semesters of the study); and all were full-time students who commuted to UAA.

Information gained as a result of this two-part study raised questions regarding how the institution facilitates persistence of early-leavers, assists them in their career planning and decision-making, and encourages their commitment as commuter students to the university.

Traditional-age students (19 and under) represented 46 percent of the cohort. This percentage exceeded the representation of this age group in community college enrollments throughout the United States (30 percent) and that of traditional-age students (10 percent) enrolled within the total student population at UAA. While traditional-age students were the dominant age group within the cohort, their retention rate was poor. As revealed in the second part of this study, this could be attributed to a variety of factors including uncertainty about their vocational and educational goals, few opportunities on the UAA campus for social integration, poor study-skills and eventual non-attendance.

Women made up 53 percent of the cohort. While the majority of females within the cohort attended full-time, 70

percent of all part-time students were female. Gender did not appear to affect persistence.

Caucasian students were the largest ethnic group (71.8 percent) within the cohort. While the ethnic profile of the cohort came close to being representative of the state's population, it deviated from that of the UAA student population by having a larger proportion of Alaska Native, American Indian, Inupiak, Aleut, Southeast Indian, Athabascan and Yupik students. These students represented 16 percent of the cohort compared with their representation (5 percent) within UAA's total student population during fall 1989. However, even though the cohort was more ethnically diverse than UAA's total student population, no American Indian, Inupiak, Aleut, Alaska Native, Southeast Indian, Athabascan or Yupik student graduated or were still enrolled by the conclusion of this study.

Eighty percent of the students within the cohort were full-time students taking 12 or more credits. This exceeded the percentage of full-time students (36 percent) within the UAA total student population on the main campus. Although the question was not directly asked during the interviews, four of the seven respondents volunteered that they had attended UAA as full-time students on a State of Alaska student loan. The large percentage of full-time students within the cohort may be attributed to the requirements of full-time status and admission to a certified postsecondary program for a student loan. The finding that the cohort had a high percentage of full-time

students and that significant numbers of them left after one or two semesters merits further attention especially with regard to Alaska Student Loan status.

The enrollment patterns of the cohort demonstrated that students who were designated as non-persisters, or did not re-enroll in subsequent semesters, could be categorized into several groups. These included students exhibiting stop-and-go enrollment patterns, students who transferred within the University of Alaska (UA) system and to postsecondary institutions outside the system, returnees, and dropouts. While the UAA Office of Institutional Research did differentiate between some of these categories of non-persisters they did not track transfers within the University of Alaska system or to other postsecondary institutions or returnees (i.e., those that transfer and then return). The majority (55 percent) of students in the cohort left some time during the first or second semester of their first year which are typical withdrawal points for non-persisting community college students.

Students' reasons for attending UAA and why they withdrew were explored in the second part of this study through interviews. Student intentions included educational/vocational exploration, preparation for transfer, the need to become more socialized, training for career change, and gaining proficiency in basic academic skills. Explanations for early withdrawal included an inability to focus educational and career goals, low academic and study skills which resulted in poor motivation and eventual

non-attendance, poor health, transfer to another postsecondary institution, achievement of personal goals, life changes, training for career change through a sequence of vocational courses that accomplished the student's goal but did not culminate in a degree. Some of these reasons for withdrawal may be within the college's ability to assist students, others may not be. While two of the seven students interviewed achieved their original goals, none graduated with an associate of applied science degree. By the time of the interviews, two of the three traditional-age students had re-enrolled at UAA and resumed their studies.

In the first part of the study an indicator of uncertainty of educational and career goals was evidenced through 51 percent of the cohort not declaring a major. This uncertainty was further explored in the second part of the study which revealed that while traditional-age students sought assistance with their educational and career planning they had little understanding of self, their options and how to seek out the resources that would help them in their career development. Traditional-age students exhibited vocational immaturity by reporting to want someone in the institution to "take them under their wing." In contrast, adult learners reported a high degree of "self-directedness" by giving examples of how they determined their educational/career goals in relationship to their self-understanding and how they used available resources to help them sort out their options and plan.

All of the non-persisters interviewed were commuter students. The effects of commuting, attention to

time-management and living a life divided between school, work, and family appeared to be the most pressing on the adult learners who had the longest commutes and the most family responsibilities. However, out of the seven students interviewed, they were the ones who achieved their initial goals despite obstacles of inclement weather, darkness, long commutes of over 80 miles, and other responsibilities. While traditional-age students reported a felt need for opportunities to interact with other students and faculty socially, this was not a primary concern of adult learners. However, although while some respondents reported UAA, as an urban, commuter postsecondary institution, with limited opportunities for social integration, they also reported that academic integration was fostered through faculty-student involvement in the classroom and through advising.

Limitations of the Study

Three factors limit the generalizability of the findings from this study to all non-persisters in the College of Career and Vocational Education. First, the population was limited to early-leavers who had not re-enrolled in subsequent semesters after being enrolled the first semester of the study or the first two semesters of the study. Because there was no comparison

group, it is not known if the characteristics reported are the same as persisters or other students who withdrew later in the study.

Second, due to the inability to contact the majority of non-persisters within the cohort by either mail or telephone, the sample used for the interviews may be not representative of the total population of non-persistors. The characteristics and views of those not contacted could be quite different than those who were.

Third, students were interviewed 37 to 48 months after they withdrew from the university. This amount of time could affect the accuracy of respondent's memory of chronological events; on the other hand, the time lag may have allowed the seven interviewees time to reflect on their behavior while attending and reasons for withdrawal.

Implications

Even with the limitations on these data, it is evident that the University of Alaska Anchorage has a problem with persistence. The findings from both parts of this research have raised major concerns that merit further study by the administration and faculty of the College of Career and Vocational Education specifically, and UAA, in general.

What retention strategies, policies and procedures can be implemented to encourage persistence of CCVE students beyond

the first or second semester? More data are needed to identify the demographic characteristics of our students, their reasons for attending UAA, how long they plan to attend and, when they do not persist, why they withdrew. Some methods of gaining this information from students new to the institution may be to collected it at the time of registration. For continuing students, the College of Career and Vocational Education could collect information from representative samples of students from all programs. This would assist the CCVE administration and department heads in planning the frequency, timing and kinds of course offerings. Students who indicate that they plan to transfer and the schools to which they plan to transfer should be identified to encourage better articulation between programs and institutions. College of Career and Vocational Education students who are upgrading their vocational/technical skills for their present occupation or to retrain could be tracked in a separate study using the Alaska Department of Labor Unemployment Insurance Wage Record Files to determine if they are employed in occupations related to their training. To determine if non-persisting students had achieved or clarified their original goals for attending UAA and enrolling in vocational/technical programs, exit interviews could be conducted with a sample of students by faculty in each department. From the collection of data, subpopulations of non-persisting students (e.g., traditional-age students, full-time students on State of Alaska student loans, Alaska Native students, and stop-and-go

students) could be identified, and retention plans tailored for each population could be developed.

To insure that an open admissions policy does not unduly prevent students from continuing their vocational/technical education due to poor academic skills, proficiency testing as an admissions requirement for all CCVE vocational/technical programs should be considered by each department. For those lacking proficiency, faculty advisement should be provided along with such planned remediation as the development of integrated academic and vocational mathematics and reading courses and the creation of peer study-skills groups.

Providing already existing counseling and advisement services, such as study-skills and time-management seminars, early in the semester and encouraging all students to participate in them could assist with retaining early leavers. Contact within the first month of each semester with all new students by the faculty from whom they are taking classes may help students resolve problems and encourage their commitment beyond the current semester.

A second concern revealed by this research is, how can UAA facilitate the career development of vocational/technical students? Counseling and Guidance staff may wish to consider a stronger emphasis on developmental counseling to assist younger students in gaining a sense of who they are and how their educational and vocational plans can enhance their self-awareness. College of Career and Vocational Education

administration may wish to consider requesting training seminars for vocational/technical faculty on career development and advisement from UAA Counseling and Guidance staff. Increased communication between UAA Counseling and Guidance staff and high school counselors through exchange and interpretation of student data and sharing information about policies, procedures and practices might be beneficial.

Providing opportunities for students to grow through such exploratory opportunities as business, industry and governmental agency internships and cooperative work experiences related to vocational/technical programs may help students of all ages to crystalize their career preferences. Some of these partnerships are already in place at UAA; they should be nurtured and expanded. A beginning exploratory course within each of the vocational/technical programs could be offered for college credit for both those UAA students who are exploring their career options as well as to Anchorage area high school students during their senior year. The seven existing articulation opportunities between the Anchorage School District King Career Center vocational programs and those within the College of Career and Vocational Education should be advertised and marketed to high school students, their parents and local guidance counselors.

A third and final question revealed by this research is, how can UAA encourage the persistence of commuter students? This might be achieved through both social and academic integration of students with the institution. Even though UAA is an urban

commuter institution with limited residential facilities and gathering places, opportunities for students to socialize with both peers and faculty could be encouraged. Some suggestions for CCVE faculty and administration to consider include:
1) the development of vocational/industrial clubs, 2) the creation of cohorts such as the cohort of students enrolled in the Ford Assets program (a two-year cooperative industry/education program designed to train line mechanics for Ford dealerships), and 3) informal social activities sponsored by individual faculty members, departments and programs. For example, one department in CCVE regularly schedules orientation sessions about the campus, student services and their program for all students new to the campus. Some faculty members encourage students to attend "enrichment opportunities"; these are additional educational opportunities related to individual courses such as visiting lecturers, field-trips, workshops and seminars attended by small groups of students with their faculty member and later discussed in class.

Strategies to be considered to encourage academic integration of commuter students might include increasing faculty-student interaction through: 1) using faculty within each vocational/technical program as "front-line" academic advisers during registration and throughout the semester, 2) taking advantage of existing technologies as LiveNet (one-way video, two-way audio) and audio-conferencing to reach and teach commuter students and encouraging faculty and students to use

UAA's electronic mail system for class discussion groups and individual advisement, 3) reviewing the timing and scheduling of courses to accommodate students with long commutes and lives divided between education, work and family responsibilities, 4) developing time-management and study-skill tips on audio tapes for students to play on their car radio while commuting.

This two-part study has revealed that students attend the University of Alaska Anchorage and enroll in vocational/technical programs for a variety of reasons--one of which is to attain an associate of applied science degree. Their reasons for non-persistence are as varied as their original reasons for attending. It is hoped that through attention to the three concerns raised by this study, persistence of early leavers and commuter can be encouraged and the career development of all students can be facilitated.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

College of Career and Vocational Education Programs Included in Study

College of Career and Vocational Education Programs
Included in Study

Air Traffic Control
Architectural/Engineering Drafting Technology
Automotive Technology
Aviation Administration
Dental Assisting
Diesel Technology
Fire Science Administration
Food Service Technology
Home Economics
Human Services
Medical Assisting
Medical Laboratory Technology
Nursing
Professional Piloting
Surveying/Mapping
Welding Technology

Appendix B

Letter from Dean Inviting Participation in the Study

UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA ANCHORAGE

3211 Providence Drive
Anchorage, Alaska 99508-8306

COLLEGE OF CAREER AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
OFFICE OF THE DEAN

July 28, 1993

605 Mumford
Anchorage, AK 99508

Dear Mr.

One of our faculty members, Flory Vinson, is doing research with students admitted to the College of Career and Vocational Education about their reasons for enrolling in vocational classes and if their goals were met. You are one of twenty students who enrolled in classes fall 1989, who have been randomly selected from the University of Alaska student data base to be interviewed. Since this is a small group of students, your perceptions of your educational experience at UAA are an important part of this reasearch.

Mrs. Vinson will be contacting you by telephone next week to schedule an interview at a convenient time for you. The interview will take about one hour and will be conducted on campus in the Beatrice McDonald Building in Mrs. Vinson's office.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact Mrs. Vinson at her home (248-5632). Although your participation in this study is voluntary, the information you provide will contribute greatly to our understanding of student motivation and intent.

Sincerely,
Redacted for privacy

Dr. Vern C. Oremus, Dean
College of Career and Vocational Education

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT

I am Flory Vinson, a doctoral candidate and researcher on a project titled:

> "A baseline study of non-persisters within a cohort of postsecondary vocational students at the University of Alaska Anchorage."

This project is sponsored by the College of Career and Vocational Education at the University of Alaska Anchorage. The purpose of this research is to ask individuals who had attended the University of Alaska Anchorage during the 1989-90 school year who voluntarily withdrew about their reasons for enrolling in the College of Career and Vocational Education, why they left, and their perceptions about their college experience. This interview is not being held to encourage you to re-enroll at the University of Alaska Anchorage.

I am the principal investigator of this project and I may be contacted at 786-4678 should you have any questions at a later date.

Your willingness to participate in this research project is very much appreciated both by the faculty at the College of Career and Vocational Education and myself as a doctoral candidate.

Before we start the interview, I would like to inform you of your rights as a participant:

First, your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary.

You are free to refuse to answer any question at any time.

You are free to withdraw from the interview at any time.

This interview will be kept strictly confidential.

Parts of this interview may be included in the final research report, but under no circumstances will your name or anything that could identify you be included in the report.

The results of this study will be shared with faculty and the Dean of the College of Career and Vocational Education as well as other administrators within the University of Alaska system. As it is part of a doctoral dissertation it will also be shared with other educators in the profession through written articles and presentations.

Your signature below indicates that I have read you the contents of this Informed Consent Form:

_____(signed)

_____(printed)

_____(dated)